

IN THE HEART OF THE TRAGEDY

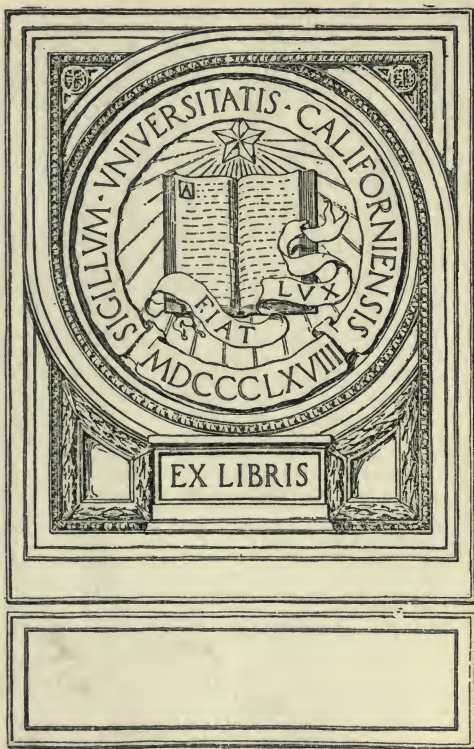
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E. GOMEZ CARRILLO

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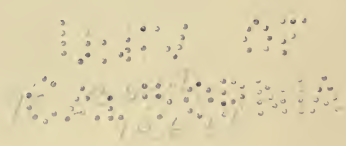
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BY
E. GOMEZ CARRILLO

TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH



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TO THE
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EDITORIAL NOTE

ENRIQUE GOMEZ CARRILLO, the author of these war notes and sketches, is one of the best-known of the younger Spanish writers and journalists of to-day. He is a native of Guatemala, where he was born in 1873, but much of his work has been done in Paris, whose literary and theatrical life before the war he described in several volumes of sketches, "El Modernismo," "Almas y Cerebros," "Como se pasa la vida," etc. He has also travelled in, and written about Russia and Greece, has published a study of Buenos Aires, and is the author of several well-known novels, and collections of short stories—"Flores de Penitencia," "Maravillas," etc.

During the war M. Gomez Carrillo has made several tours along the Western front as correspondent of *El Liberal*. The results of earlier impressions were published in three volumes—"Notes on the War," "Battlefields and Ruins," and "In the Trenches." Last year, in company with the Marquess of Valdeiglesias (proprietor and director of the well-known Madrid daily *La Epoca*),

and several other Spanish journalists occasionally mentioned in his book, he visited England and the British front, and the party were entertained at a luncheon at the Savoy Hotel by the proprietors of all the London newspapers, under the presidency of Lord Burnham.

M. Gomez Carrillo is an old and faithful friend, both of France and of England, and the Allies owe much to the vigorous descriptive talent with which he has presented their achievements and expounded their cause to the Spanish-speaking peoples of the old and the new worlds.

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IN THE HEART OF THE TRAGEDY

CHAPTER I

THE "CAPITAL" OF THE BRITISH ARMY

AT a certain town in France in 1914 one of our party stops before an enormous frontage of brick, and, after reading the notice over the chief entrance, he exclaims :

"What wonderful people! Why, they've even found time to establish a seminary in this place!"

We others burst out laughing; for we know that the English College dates from the sixteenth century. And yet, at heart, we recognise that our friend's naïve astonishment conveys a perfectly just observation.

"This is our capital," says the Captain, who as a rule serves us as guide.

And the friendly innkeeper, who gives us the savoury hospitality of dinner, when we return from our excursions at the front, murmurs gently, half ironically, half pleased :

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"It is we, the natives, who need interpreters here now."

"Do you complain of things?" I asked him one morning.

"Not a bit," he answered.

And indeed nobody resents the invasion. Are not these fresh-faced khaki-clad boys heroic brothers who are giving their blood to water the land of France, threatened by the barbarians? Yes, indeed! Besides, considered from the rather prosaic business point of view, they are also the best clients in the world, the most generous, the most liberal, and the easiest to satisfy. With their peculiar attitude as "gentlemen" richly maintained by the Government, they feel unable to economise, not only on the shilling a day they get as pay, but even on what the authorities give them for clothes and food. The little sly-faced French boys shout "Souvenir," and the kind-hearted Tommies take their sweets out of their knapsacks, tear off their gilt buttons, bring out their regulation knives, and part with their badges and trappings.

Our host says, "They are so pleasant, amiable, and gentle. Look! Would you not say they were at school?"

And sitting round the marble tables, the good Tommies silently sip their great glasses of beer, without saying a word. For hours together they remain thus quiet and impassive, as though they were waiting for something that never comes. When they want another glass, they strike the tables with their pipes or make a sign. When the time comes for the official communiqué which announces the latest achievements of their comrades in the

trenches, they read the printed sheet, without turning a hair, and say nothing at all. When the distant trumpet calls them, they get up, pay, and march away. . . .

* * *

In the streets, where we see them now, they do not seem to be any more talkative. Those that are out for a walk go along two by two, or four by four, pipe in mouth, always silent, always apparently absent-minded, always stiff and straight, with a firm tread; and so sure of themselves that they seem always to have lived in this place. Nothing awakens in them that intense curiosity which makes the French “poilu” stop before any remarkable building. They pass the noble palaces, with coats of arms upon them, and the fine towers, without even looking up. The only thing that occasionally forces them to modify their silence and indifference is the shop windows, piled up with bottles of eau-de-Cologne and flasks of liqueurs. Then indeed their bright eyes seem to grow brighter, and their lips open to pronounce, with profound respect, the names of the most famous whiskies and other drinks. But unfortunately the stern-looking men of the military police, with their red stripes, are always hovering about these tempting shops, in order to secure that the orders against drunkenness are carried out; and Tommy ranges up before the policeman, not without a certain uneasiness. . . .

* * *

The town is so long used to seeing only silent soldiers in the streets, that our own group of talka-

tive civilians attracts the attention of the little boys. What on earth can we be about, we who stop in front of each historical building, we who conduct animated arguments in front of the ancient doors, and touch, with disrespectful hands, the stones of the holy places? At the entrance of the Church, before the Gothic lace-work of the belfry tower, a number of loafers gather about us, very ragged but very wide-awake; and they are obviously trying to guess what we are saying in a language quite unknown to them, which is, nevertheless, the language their ancestors spoke in the sixteenth century. Our guide looks not unsympathetically at them, hands them a few coppers, and asks them the way to the Monastery.

"The Monastery!" they all shout. "This way, this way."

They seem pleased to meet foreigners who are not mutes, and they insist upon going in front of us to show us the quickest way through these narrow picturesque streets. . . .

* * *

When we come back to the town, the Tommies confront us again in their habitual frigidity of aspect. We see nothing but khaki uniforms, nothing but close-shaven faces, clear bright eyes, and mouths tight shut. There is not a word to be heard, and yet the noise is deafening. A bustling discordant noise, feverish, clashing; a noise at once serious, hard, and full of energy; relieved only by the happy cries of the children in the streets. The atmosphere sounds thus with the military cars, the military bicycles, and the din of

the military workshops. One hears sirens, anvils being hammered, motor cars, noises of every description. Officers go by on horseback, slim and elegant. Out of the windows of the restaurants there comes the clatter of plates and cups. The solemn moment of supper is at hand, and the sons of Great Britain, who have made a great feature of this hour, seem to welcome it with enthusiasm. Smoking carts travel fast along the pavements, taking hot meals to the various quarters, and to the sky-blue tents guarded by severe police. The soldiers crowd in, asking for various condiments for the nourishing soup which the authorities provide for them. Sentinels at the doors of the palaces march up and down with a hard tread, showing their impatience. The “national stomach,” about which Oscar Wilde used to speak, is more eloquent in these men than their lips. In the shops, the dark-haired girls, with malicious tender eyes, smile at the nice fresh-faced boys. A peaceful sense of happiness, a good humour without laughter or jesting, something of a general contentment, comes over the entire city, and gives it an aspect of holiday-making and picnic. And we too, although we have not the honour of being English, are sensitive to the scent of the army soup that floats about the air. We murmur, as we quicken our pace: “Our good host expects us at the inn.”

CHAPTER II

THE PERPLEXING MYSTERY OF THE ENGLISH SOUL

Has this people a soldierlike spirit? Has it a warlike soul?—those are the questions we have asked again and again, since the war began. And the more we continue to observe its customs, its laws, its character and its type of mind, the more contradictory are the answers we are inclined to give.

Obviously, if the type of perfect militarism be the Prussian type, one can say, without fear of being wrong: "No, certainly, the English are not naturally soldiers." For a race individually proud and instinctively free, a discipline like that endured by the Germans would be the most intolerable of affronts. No very profound study of comparative psychology is needed to discover the irreconcilable opposition that exists between the German and British virtues from a purely military point of view. The positive value of the two armies now fighting in the plains of Flanders is not only different but actually opposed. Though it may seem a paradox, one may safely say that the heroism of the Prussian troops, that splendid heroism, which in battle reaches the greatness of a holocaust, is composed of innumerable timidities. Watch the recruits learning their drill: they one

and all tremble, one and all wait in terror for the cries of command. The faces of all of them indicate humility and fear. When the fist of the officer in command comes down hard upon the head of one of the new recruits, the others, far from being indignant, remain motionless, in stony attitudes. Clearly, they are convinced that nothing in the world is more natural than the brutality of the divine *Feldwebel*. And if, from a group of soldiers, we go on to observe the whole army and the whole country, we find still the same terror, dominated by the same force. Men of Latin race who live in Berlin, Hamburg or Cologne can never manage to explain that, in a people of warriors, individual daring should be so rare. Insult an isolated German, indeed, and you will seldom find that he is disposed to answer your attack with violence.

There is a phrase, which, viewed by the light of history, seems now to be the expression of mere hypocrisy, but which contains none the less a literal truth: "We are pacific"—say the subjects of the Kaiser—"we are not on the lookout for quarrels, like Frenchmen or Spaniards. We are neither quixotic, nor of the type of Cyrano." That is undeniable. Each one of them, taken separately, is a peaceable creature. It is the German Empire as a whole that is warlike. With England, on the other hand, it is just the other way. An Englishman, a Scot, an Irishman has in the blood a certain combative ferment, which prompts him to the cult of physical exercises in which there is an element of rivalry and danger. A dispute in a London bar does not end in immense arguments, as it would in Berlin;

but leads, inevitably, to fisticuffs. There is something of a sacred institution, almost of a mystical ceremony, in the right of self-defence claimed by the British citizen who trusts in his own pluck and in his own strength to secure respect for himself. Without flourish, without swagger, without insolence, these fresh-faced, stolid men are always ready to risk their lives in order to defend their honour or tranquillity. And woe to him who attempts to annoy them unduly! Even the humblest recruits, undergoing their training at the hands of grave and frigid-looking sergeants, retain an air of nobility and personal pride, which makes the use of any sort of violence, by those commanding them, impossible. Has one ever heard of ill-treatment in a British barracks? Has one ever been told that British officers are provided with lashes to help them to lead their men? A few minutes ago, we were watching some Tommies—mere boys—drilling in a farm-yard. They were commanded by an athletic-looking officer. The orders were short, the movements sharp, the whole result rhythmical. Yet one or two newcomers persistently failed to understand the word of command. The commander came up to each of them and said something to them that provoked smiles instead of terror.

And yet—strategists will tell me—a German regiment is a more formidable instrument of war than an English one. How do you explain that—you who admire the English and look down upon the Germans?

It is just that “and yet” indeed that I cannot explain at all. For a race of men conscious of

their personal dignity will always be unfitted to train armies whose discipline resembles slavery.

Read, for instance, the following telegram sent from Calais, and say, if it would be possible for Sir Douglas Haig's general staff to proceed in the same manner with his regiments of Tommies:

"When the last battles took place near Saint-Eloi the German soldiers were obliged to attack with bayonets fixed. Behind them was placed a line of men with orders to shoot all those who should attempt to retreat. . . . Moreover, the sick are treated without the slightest consideration."

No; it would be impossible to treat the English—impossible to discipline them—thus! And for that reason I repeat that if the ideal type of soldier be the German, England is not, never has been and never will be a military country at all. But, fortunately, it is not only the Prussian system that gives triumphant results in the world. Those very Berlin critics confess that the French army is a marvellous instrument of war; and yet we know well that in France the soldier is a free citizen, self-respecting, and conscientious, whom nobody illtreats. Let us then give up comparison, and once more let us ask: Has England a *soldier's* soul in her?

* * *

"To understand our actual behaviour," say the English, "you must know our national character thoroughly."

And then, with the perpetual contradiction that runs through all relating to this people, they add:

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“The only trouble is that to do this is absolutely impossible.”

And I certainly believe that, on this point at least, they are not mistaken; for even Kipling confesses that it is no easy matter to penetrate deeply into the minds and feelings of his own countrymen. If you observe the English superficially, you will get the impression that you are dealing with a flock of thoroughbreds whose souls move automatically. All the men shave in the same way, all preserve the same silence, all dress in the same fashion, and all take tea at the same fixed time. Even their homes resemble one another, and the critic who maintained that in Great Britain there is only one house reproduced a million times was not so very far wrong.

Whether we call it instinctive discipline, or the spirit of routine, does not matter. The apparent monotony of things British is a fact. Yet when we try to build up philosophical theories upon the basis of this monotony, we meet unexpected surprises.

Consider, for example, the case of Bernard Shaw. In which of the countries concerned in the terrible struggle, could a celebrated writer have spoken as this paradox-monger did? Because he placed himself “above the conflict,” and because he tried to argue with cold reason in his patriotism, Romain Rolland has become, in spite of the freedom of thought that exists among the French, a type of the most odious moral treachery. And yet Bernard Shaw, whose famous pamphlet was a defence of Germany and an attack upon England, is still honoured, respected and admired in his own

country. Everybody is free to express his own ideas, say people in London, and I can easily believe it. But, after all, there remains the question of where the psychological backbone of this people is to be found.

The only sentiment that stands out clearly in the collective soul of England is the sense of chivalry. In the fortnight during which our visit has lasted, we have had opportunities of talking with soldiers, sailors, journalists, policemen, and even with people of the lower classes, and yet we have never heard a single phrase against the Germans in general. When they speak of them, they invariably call them the Boches, certainly. But on their lips this word loses all that it once had hard and bitter in it, and turns, thanks to the British accent, into a familiar, contemptuous and ironical expression. The Boches are, in principle, the great barbarians who have dishonoured the war with their useless cruelties, with their expanding bullets, and their diabolical inventions of every sort. Nobody forgets that—when it is a question of summing up the moral side of the conflict. But, in their dislike of phrases, fine speeches, and the expression of anger, the men in khaki seem willingly to shun this theme, with the same lack of “side” that makes them avoid the grandiloquent phrases of patriotism, of national honour, or of collective glory. What is the good of repeating what everybody knows? they think; and in their talk, which never touches general ideas, but which keeps to anecdotes and minor observations of fact, or to stories about episodes of the war, their tone is so gentle, so just and so measured, that very often it is we who seem to be the com-

batants, with our enthusiasm and our passion, and they the neutrals who are merely looking on.

Not long ago, as I was glancing at the books which make up the library at General Headquarters where we lodged, I came across two or three German books devoted to the celebration of *Deutschland über alles*, amongst various historical works in French and English, and I said to myself: "Our officers here have failed to notice that these are German epics, in which every moment the cry of 'Gott strafe England' resounds." And, calling our host, I drew his attention to the books.

"Oh yes," he murmured, glancing at them, "that surprises you, just as it surprises the French who come to visit us; but we think it is a good thing to read everything we can that helps us to understand what the enemy thinks. There are many most interesting and instructive things in books of that sort. Sometimes we are wrong in acting thus, and yet we have always been like that. The most respected heroes we have are our greatest adversaries—Joan of Arc, and Napoleon."

"That is what is called the spirit of chivalry," I answered.

"No, it is only fair play."

* * *

Fair or frank play, loyalty in the game, sport without passion, nobility in sport. That is doubtless what war means to the English. Psychologists attribute all this to the influence of their sporting habits, which reconcile violence with good form, but I think, on the contrary, that, if English sport can go as far as bloodshed without any bitter-

ness blinding those involved, this is due to the legacy of warlike feelings which these people seem to have borrowed from the Homeric poems. Hector, who cries out to his rival—"My friends, prepare to die or else to give me death," is a hero whom one meets at every turn in the course of British history. Learned men have proved that the famous *tirez les premiers, messieurs*, was not said by the French, but by the English. And English, too, were those gentlemen at the Siege of Calais, who, ignoring the respect which they owed to the will of their Sovereign, set themselves against the execution of the burgomasters, and spoke in such a way, and sang such praises of the heroism of their enemy, that they succeeded in realising the ideal of justice that inspired them. An Englishman too, and a great Baron, was he who, when he had the power to bury Henry of Vaux under the ruins of the Castle of Courmicy, called him aside, and in a speech full of delicacy and humanity, made him understand how vain would be the sacrifice of his life and those of his companions; and most English of all was the Prince of Wales who, after the Battle of Poitiers, when he held the King of France prisoner, knelt down before him and said: "My lord, I think that you should rejoice and be glad in your soul, because, although you have lost the day, none shall deny that in prowess and glory, you have shown yourself the superior of us all."

* * *

As with individuals, so with peoples—virtues are ineradicable. The English of to-day, as far

as fair play is concerned, are the equals of the English of yesterday. It matters little that the enemy shows himself unworthy of such courtly treatment. An officer to whom I was speaking about the German atrocities, a little while ago, answered me :

“What would you have us do ? If the niggers in Central Africa were to eat a soldier whom they had captured, we should not therefore eat niggers who fall into our power ! ”

But they go even further in their chivalrous generosity when they declare that it is not right to make all the Germans responsible for what some of them have done. In the letter of a Captain published by John Buchan, I come across these lines which seem as though they had been written by the companion of some mediæval knight :

“The reported atrocities in Belgium are terrible, but I am bound to say that those of the enemy who are fighting here against us have not been guilty of any acts of the sort. They fight splendidly and are much to be admired.”

There is something “evangelical” (in the Protestant use of the word) in this way of looking at things. According to Luther, each individual is only responsible for himself. For one who has not sinned there can be no punishment, although his brothers sinned. On the other hand, for the real sinner there can be no forgiveness. For indeed the curious and characteristic thing is that in the English system, chivalry is not always accompanied by pity, as it is with French courtesy. No ; spies,

plunderers of villages, murderers of the wounded have good cause to know it. In a case when any repentance is shown, there is some hope of pardon from the officers of Joffre. With the officers of Lord Kitchener, execution follows the crime without any hope of escape. Bayard, after having shown his passion, is yet capable of pity. The English knight never loses his temper; but he never pardons either. Fair play—yes; but play that involves making a fool of oneself—no.

* * *

War, in any case, is with the English a game of chance, as well as a sport—a game played with the hands and the feet rather than with the spirit. The English do not understand the ardour of feeling which animates the French people with so sublime and terrible a fire. “If they spoke of glory and honour as the Latin races do,” says Chevrillon, “they would appear like actors to themselves, and the fact is that, however hard the press of London may try to make the public understand that it is actually a question of a fight for the independence of the nation, nobody succeeds in getting into his head the unlikely notion that the country is really in grave danger.”

“Our misfortune,” an officer who believes in conscription told me the other day, “is that we have never been invaded, since the fabulous times of William the Conqueror. If, like the Germans or the French, we had felt the wounds inflicted by the enemy upon our own soil, we should not think or feel in the same way. In any very for-

midable struggle, hate is an absolute necessity. We have no hatred in our hearts, nor do we possess the other admirable spring of action which men call vanity. No. It does not matter to us if people say that others get there before us, wherever they want to go. What is important in our minds is that we do get where we want to go, and of that we are generally pretty sure. Remember our disasters in the Transvaal. Another people might have suffered from the sense of humiliation. We did not. We do not know the torments and the pleasures of self-esteem. If you look into the eyes of our soldiers for the reflection of such glory or suffering as lightens the eyes of the French, after a triumph or a defeat, you will never see it there. When they have won a battle, they are about as much pleased as if they had won a football match. When they lose, they console themselves with the conviction that they have fought as well as possible."

* * *

I had already noticed this, more than once during our recent excursions to the front. Officers tell us that on such and such a day they won such and such a trench, in just the same tranquil tone as that in which they say: "The enemy took such and such positions from us on another day." For them, a soldier's duty is not to conquer, but to fight. And, possessed as they are with the idea that the adversary is worthy of all respect for his strength, his bravery and his energy, they are not in the least humiliated by disaster. At first, when

the asphyxiating gases made their appearance, there was a general movement of indignation, just as there would have been at a boxing match if one of the combatants had given a blow against the rules. The thing simply was not "gentlemanly"; but as soon as the Government provided them with protective masks, they thought no more of the business, but simply went on with the fighting without further discussion about the inhumanity and wickedness in the latest methods of the enemy. From the moment that the "starter" accepts the new conditions, there is no need for any further talk.

Imagination, subtlety, and the spirit of observation have never been virtues of the British. With minds at once slow and uniform, without great curiosity, and with no fantastic notions, they submit to the laws of war in just the same measure as to the laws of sport. "We are simply good boys," writes one of them, "honourable and healthy, and we think only of respecting discipline, of shooting straight, of enduring fatigue, in laughter or in silence, according to the mood of the moment, and then if possible, of taking a bath and of eating in a fairly decent manner." The very words acquire upon the lips of these men a sense that we do not give to them. They speak of "respectable" and "decent," much more often in connection with clothes and food, than to describe feelings which, they think, do not need adjectives to qualify them. A phrase like the *Debout les morts!* of the French would not be understood by any Tommy; nor would he understand insults directed against those in the trenches opposite. There is a letter

by an officer written in hospital, in which, after describing how he was wounded, he adds: "The German attack was extraordinary. Hundreds of men steadily replaced those that fell, and the lines closed up as our machine-guns mowed them down, as though by enchantment. They kept coming on and falling, and this strange march went on for hours. So when people tell you that they are not brave, do not believe them. Sometimes they do not meet a bayonet charge well, but under fire they behave in such a way that it is impossible not to admire them." This tranquil admiration is not, as it is in some other peoples, a sort of testimonial extorted from the pride of the adversary, but simply an honest recognition of plain truth. And we meet it in common soldiers as well as in officers; in civilians and soldiers alike. To admire one's adversary, however hateful he may be, is not here a sin that one tries to conceal.

Yesterday, at lunch, as we were speaking of the battle of Verdun, one of our party expressed himself ironically and contemptuously about the ability of the Crown Prince. "Ah, that caricature of a Prince, that sinister and grotesque figure!" The officers about us said not a word, but Lord D., always witty, murmured with his usual gentleness:

"The Crown Prince is godfather to my daughter."

That was all.

Those spiritual and intellectual relationships which Romain Rolland places "above the conflict" are by no means broken for the English. According to them it is a question of obtaining victory, of securing what the Government has decided to

secure, of imposing a peace necessary for the interests of Europe ; but not of unnecessary destruction ; still less of insult and injury.

* * *

It is true that the newspapers are not generally so discreet and chivalrous on this point, and the word Boche takes on an accent of hatred and contempt in the words of certain polemist, but Galsworthy, one of the greatest of English psychologists, says : “ We are not to be judged by our press which is in the hands of journalists who are not true Englishmen, not typical, and who generally exaggerate a good deal.” Later he adds : “ We must not be judged by our literature either ” ; and he concludes with the assurance that the Englishman, properly so-called, is incapable of self-expression and never has expressed himself satisfactorily. Thus, then, the man who has best defined his fellow-countrymen admits that it is impossible to define them. Can we foreigners, then, be so rash as to hope to see clearer than he does ? Certainly not. And yet, just as national contrasts often surprise us as remarkable phenomena, so we find ourselves better placed for the task of making them felt and understood.

Let us look again at the way in which they speak of the war, and we shall observe something that the English do not think worthy of any attention at all. I allude to the sort of smiling detachment with which all but recruiting sergeants and politicians with a mission regard the tragic phases of the contest. Wells himself, after accepting Norman

Angel's idea that the war will ruin both conquered and conqueror, renounces his subtle reflections and says with a gentle irony: "That is precisely the only good that can come out of the struggle that we are witnessing. Nothing that is worth while in life 'pays'—neither love, nor art, nor honour itself."

In Germany that same answer, about a matter of vital importance for the future, would be considered as a sally in very bad taste. Not so in England. In England irony has its rights, even in the most painful moments. If you do not believe this, recall an article published about the catastrophe of the *Lusitania*, in which after examining the methods of modern defence adopted by the Germans, the writer concluded: "Don't you see, dear German Professors, that the very richness of your inventive genius causes men to doubt all your explanations? If I had been in your place, I should have been satisfied with expressing the great truth that contains an excuse for your action, and I should have said that you sent the *Lusitania* to the bottom, because, as we pretend to be kings of the sea, so everybody has the right to send us into the water in order to put us into our true place." In other countries gravity is demanded in the treatment of tragic matters that concern the national honour or warlike pride. In England, not even those who celebrate most enthusiastically the epic of the moment, believe in the abstract greatness of war, or in the beauty of the patriotic sentiments evoked by it. "I believe in peace with all my heart," writes Galsworthy, "I believe that war is a crime, I hate militarism. I hate force. And I profoundly

distrust the common meaning of the phrase 'national honour.' "

* * *

Another thing that psychologists "distrust" is the spirit of initiative, the living genius and the sensibility of the English people. One must read the fine study by Galsworthy on the soul of his fellow-countrymen to see with what frankness this people speaks of itself :

"The Englishman, partly through a lack of imagination and nervous sensibility, partly through his inbred dislike of extremes and habit of minimising the expression of everything, is a perfect example of the conservation of energy. . . . He is a slow starter, but there is no stronger finisher, because he has by temperament and training the faculty of getting through any job he gives his mind to with a minimum expenditure of vital energy.

"He absorbs ideas slowly ; would rather not imagine anything decidedly till he is obliged ; but in proportion to the slowness with which he can be moved, is the slowness with which he can be removed ! Hence, the symbol of the bulldog. When he does see and seize a thing he holds fast.

"For the particular situation which the Englishman has now to face, he is terribly well adapted. Because he has so little imagination, so little power of expression, he is saving nerve all the time. Because he never goes to extremes he is saving energy of body and spirit. That the men of all nations are about equally endowed with courage and self-sacrifice, has been proved in these last six months ;

it is to other qualities that one must look for final victory in a war of exhaustion. The Englishman does not look into himself; he does not brood; he sees no further forward than is necessary; and he must have his joke. These are fearful and wonderful advantages. Examine the letters and diaries of the various combatants, and you will see how far less imaginative and reflecting (though often shrewd, practical, and humorous) the English are than any others; you will gain, too, a deep, a deadly conviction that behind them is a fibre like rubber, that may be frayed and bent a little this way and that, but can neither be permeated nor broken.

“When this war began, the Englishman rubbed his eyes steeped in peace. He is still rubbing them just a little, but less and less every day. A profound lover of peace by habit and tradition, he has actually realised by now that he is ‘in for it’ up to the neck. To any one who really knows him—that is a portent!

“Let it be freely confessed that from an æsthetic point of view the Englishman, devoid of high lights and shadows, coated with drab, and superhumanly steady on his feet, is not too attractive. But for the wearing, tearing, slow and dreadful business of this war, the Englishman—fighting of his own free will, unimaginative, humorous, competitive, practical, never in extremes, a dumb, inveterate optimist, and terribly tenacious—is equipped with victory.”

* * *

I have quoted that page because it contains the sum and substance of what England thinks of her own virtues and defects, and because it explains

also the mysteries that most astonish the Latin peoples—and even the German peoples too—in the actual conduct of Great Britain. When we ask how it is possible that a country that disposes of three millions of soldiers, only occupies some hundred kilometres in a front of about a thousand, the one thing we forget is that this people is proud of the slowness with which it sets to work. When we observe the disdainful detachment with which Tommy alludes to his own doings, we do not sufficiently recognise that a sensitive imagination is indispensable for the proper appreciation of reality. When we are surprised that the hatred of Germany is only met by a sort of chivalrous gallantry, we do not reflect that even now the free citizen of Britain is, as it were, rubbing his eyes without bringing himself to understand that the actual struggle is not a Colonial campaign, but a fight to the death. And when we are disconcerted at the frivolous tone of some of the great writers in London, we lose sight of the fact that, even in the midst of tragedy, this people demands an exercise for the sense of humour it possesses.

CHAPTER III

A HOSPITAL AT THE FRONT

BEFORE introducing us to the heroes who are fighting in the trenches, the English want to let us get a glimpse of those who suffer, as well. . . .

In the neighbourhood of Boulogne, by the sea, in the middle of a little wood, from which on clear days one can see the coast of England, there stands, not so much a hospital, as an immense city of sanatoria, composed of hundreds of white huts. From Amiens to Calais, in the plains of Picardy, a whole new country has arisen which recalls the far-off rustic homes of Canada. These men from beyond the Channel think little of that taste for the picturesque which runs up really artistic villages behind the French lines, with thatched roofs and walls made out of branches. They are content with row upon row of timber boxes, covered with ribbed tin, and placed in the healthiest situation they can find. And to the reproach of monotony they quickly reply that the æsthetic side of things matters little, so long as comfort and hygiene triumph. And these two goddesses of modernity certainly do triumph in these tragic places. . . .

"We've not had a single epidemic here," our

conducting officer assures us, as he takes us into the hospital we are about to visit.

And the Major in the R.A.M.C. tells us that his staff have achieved the impossible in that they have cured wounded men, with seemingly rudimentary methods, in less time than is needed by the doctors in the great hospitals, in London and in Paris. "Here," he exclaims with pride, "a broken leg is an affair of three weeks in all."

* * *

Arms and legs form the great preoccupation of the sanitary service here. At first, the commonest wounds were head wounds; but these, thanks to the helmets now in use for fighting, have diminished by 90 per cent. On the other hand, arms and legs it is not so easy to protect. And so, out of every ten huts, in this institution, more than half are appointed for cripples and the maimed.

"Please come in."

The sight of the enormous room amazes us. The sick are not lying down on truckle beds, but hoisted upon strange-looking apparatuses made of leather and lint. It is the newest and most effective system. But it has such an unforeseen aspect that it produces a sensation of discomfort. In their ghastly pallor the wounded look as though they were tied upon some form of inquisitorial rack. When one of them raises his body, the whole mechanism enveloping and sustaining him moves and creaks.

"Notice," murmurs the Major, "that however much they move their bodies, the sick men in-

variably keep the limb that is shattered absolutely still."

A silence of death prevails in all this vast enclosure. The nurses and attendants walk without the faintest noise. The doctors attend to their cases without opening their lips. There are uneasiness, pain, pity in the air. . . . And yet, in the eyes of each sufferer, one reads only a great resignation and a great determination to be master of his pain.

* * *

Before taking us over the wards of the hospital, our guide had shown us with pride a few of the letters written from their beds of suffering by the wounded. "Read them," he said, "read them. . . . They will best give you an accurate idea of the character of our men." And he placed such scraps before us as these I copy out haphazard—

A sergeant writes : "I was wounded in the arm by a shell. Seven officers were killed last Thursday, but Captain Grenfell was saved with me. What do you think of the charge of the 9th ? It was worth while getting wounded to take part in that !"

"I met John in the hospital here," says a private, "he was wounded and dying. I asked him whether he would like to give me a message for any of his family, and he answered with tears in his eyes : 'I ran away from home and enlisted a year ago. My parents don't know I'm here, but tell them I don't repent of what I did.' When I repeated this, later, to our fellows, they wept like children. But bear in mind that this is the spirit that inspires England in the gigantic struggle. I got to know his name and the address of his family from his

regiment, and now I'm going to write to them to tell them they can well be proud of their boy."

"No regiment ever fought more stubbornly than ours," writes a subaltern, "and none has such fine officers to fight side by side with. But there's no good expecting the men to accomplish miracles. However brave our boys may be, we can't fight against a force twenty or thirty times superior in numbers to our own. If those of you who have spoken with contempt of English officers had seen how they manage their men without ever sparing themselves, you would be ashamed of yourselves. We are determined, one fine day, to return with our fellows and to get our own back after all——"

The manly words we read a few minutes ago in the Major's office had then only a vague interest for us. But they now seem to live anew with a breath of quivering reality. These same fresh-faced boys here stretched out, looking so coldly and calmly at us, are sacrificed on the altar of an ideal. There is not one who does not surprise me by the fortitude he shows. Not one mouth is convulsed with pain. There is not the sign of a tear in the eyes of any of these men. . . .

* * *

The doctor who goes round with us tells us that only those who are convalescent sometimes show signs of depression. "And yet," he adds, "that is not on account of what they have actually been through, so much as because of a sort of 'spleen' which attacks the very bravest at times."

There is indeed, in this long monotonous war, an epidemic, not considered of any importance

by the medical profession, but striking enough none the less. The French use the word *cafard* to describe it. Have you heard of it? "It is a definitely morbid state"—writes Pierre Mille—"and it comes from the continued pressure of despondency which ends by producing a real contagious illness." And if it is remarkable amongst French soldiers, who carry a certain gaiety in their blood, and who are, besides, in their own country and fighting to defend their own homes, imagine what it must be with the English who have always been given to "spleen," or melancholy, by nature.

The doctor to whom I spoke of this, smiled and said: "Yes, yes, I know. *Cafard—spleen*. The Colonials suffer from it above all. There are many mental cases in this war. See there, in that passage, those two red-cheeked youths who are staring silently at one another. The two poor fellows have lost all memory of everything, so that they don't even recall their own names. As they do no harm, they are at liberty. But we have others we are obliged to watch. Nights spent in the trenches, continuous bombardments, weariness and ennui, sudden surprises—all contribute to drive those mad who have not very strong heads. Later, what will make us think with horror of this time, will be the numbers of madmen and blind men. In Germany, above all, madness has made great havoc. Amongst us, there's less of it. And there's even less amongst the French, who, with their rather fragile appearance, possess an almost incredible fund of nervous resistance behind it——"

* * *

The Major stops a moment and looks at the two mad soldiers. A glimmer of sadness passes into his eyes, and one sees a slight tightening at the edges of his lips :

"Madmen," he murmurs, "mad" . . .

Then, turning towards us, he adds :

"The most dreadful memory of my life in this campaign is that of the retreat from Belgium, when we were forced, one autumn evening, to evacuate our hospital, and to carry our wounded and sick away to Poperinghe. On account of the study I have always devoted to nervous cases, my chiefs considered that I ought to look after the transport of the mad soldiers. . . . There were some Englishmen, some Belgians, and even a few German prisoners amongst them. And, as all of them were quiet enough, I didn't even think of taking with me the strongest of our attendants and nurses, whose services were needed elsewhere. The waggon in which we had to travel for hours was under the fire of the enemy's artillery. After I had told my unhappy patients to be very very careful, we set off, and for a few minutes all went as well as could be expected. Calmly and silently the madmen followed me like a flock of sheep, without paying the smallest heed to the bombs that kept bursting amongst the hops near by, about fifty metres away from us. But soon a German battery happened, by a disastrous chance, to notice our procession, and it at once pointed at us. The first shell that burst right on the high-road several yards behind us, robbed my soldiers of all their calm. Some of them began to laugh, others waved their arms at the sky, three or four began to

weep like children. 'Let's hurry on,' I said to them. They did not heed me. Motionless, in the middle of the road, they stood scrutinising the shell that had just exploded, chattering incoherently to one another. I was exasperated, and began to push them roughly, in the hopes of getting them away from so dangerous a place; when, suddenly, another shell fell in the midst of the group and killed two of my poor madmen. Then, as though in obedience to some mysterious voice, the others sat down about the corpses, quite calm, quite happy, laughing and talking, with the greatest naturalness in the world. My cries and threats were all of no avail. One of them, a Belgian, kept on looking at me with ironical eyes, as if I were the real madman, and not he. . . . And the truth is that, at that moment, I don't know if my reason did not leave me for a minute. My position was far from pleasant. What was I to do? Instinct counselled me to make off. The sense of duty forced me not to move. . . . But now, as the bombardment increased, and as each explosion only added to the tranquil gaiety of my patients, I decided finally to go back to see if I could not come across some help. . . . When I got back to them, accompanied by about a dozen stretcher-bearers, the madmen were still sitting in the same place. Ten or twelve shells had fallen in the midst of the circle, wounding several of them. One, above all, with nostrils torn open, his face covered with blood, was a dreadful sight. The others were looking at him, and laughing; and he too was laughing away, gently and quietly, with them——"

While the Major was telling us this ghastly

tale, pronouncing every syllable as though he feared he would not be understood, I could not take my eyes off the two boys who were still standing there, straight upright, gazing at one another with a curiosity born of hallucination. Brothers in arms and brothers in misfortune, one would have said that each was seeking in the other for something that should help him to remember his own tragic story, his own suffering, the nightmare that was his alone. . . .

“Let us go.”

* * *

We continue our uneasy walk through the endless rooms. I had never yet visited a military hospital, although on several occasions French officers had offered to take me over the ambulances on the front. Pain is a spectacle that does not attract me. And besides, the recollection of a day on which Dr. Doyen had let me see a series of horrible operations, has stayed by me always, like a kind of guilty conscience. Those faces, those groans, those wounds in the passive flesh! To calm me, the great French surgeon told me that what appeared to be a cruelty was in reality an act of kindness and pity. And yet I have always felt that between pain and death, the lesser of the two evils is the second; and if in order to save a man it is necessary to make him suffer like a martyr, it would be sometimes better not to save him at all. “What is life after all?” asks Manuel Machado. Life is, indeed, nothing. Suffering—yes. . . .

“What is that?”

Through a half-closed door come groans. The door opens and a nurse appears carrying in her arms, as though it were a child, a leg pouring with blood. After her comes a man dressed in white, whose hands are red. . . .

"Good morning, Major!"

"Good morning, doctor."

The two doctors smile, while, from the far end of the room, the lamentations of the man who has just been thus mutilated, ascend towards a sky deaf to his cries. . . .

And the two doctors talk quietly to one another. What is a leg to them? What is a man groaning aloud? What is blood? In their sublime kindness, surgeons end by being as impassive, as emotionless, as barbaric or savage deities. . . . Drunk with Promethean pride, they think but of the virtue of their instruments, which snatch its prey from the very clutch of Destiny. They pay no heed to what is terrifying in all that they have to do.

"The gangrene was beginning to gain ground," says the man in white. . . .

My companions listen calmly to the learned explanations, while I feel my poor forehead covered with a cold sweat. What the surgeon says interests me less than what the unhappy man is suffering, whose bleeding limb is all that I have seen of him.

"Come. Let us go."

* * *

Outside, in the courtyard, in order that we may admire the miracles of science, the Major gathers one or two of the crippled men together. One of them has lost both arms; another both hands;

the others have only lost a leg each, and they are walking about balancing themselves on apparatus very perfectly designed.

"Halt!" cries a voice.

The poor fellows get up and stand in military formation. Their lips quiver. Their eyes shine full of life and eagerness for living.

"Right turn! March!"

Then, those that can walk with crutches stick them under their shoulders, and a grotesque and pathetic procession begins, in which the invalids strive to imitate the comic rigidity of the German troops, laughing aloud as they approach us. . . .

And I too laugh, together with my companions—a laughter full of tears. . . .

Well, this is war!

CHAPTER IV

THE ENGLISH AND THE GERMAN PRISONERS

I USED sincerely to believe that nothing made the English so indignant as the insults which the Germans have hurled at them since the very beginning of the war. The famous phrase "Gott strafe England," the various speeches against the greed of Britain, and, above all, the words of the Kaiser about the "contemptible army" of Lord Kitchener had made me think, in common with the rest of the world, that the hatred of England responded to the hatred of Germany. Did not the English prisoners assure us that their keepers treat them worse than they treat the French or Russians? "For the French," says Captain Allen, "the men here feel a certain sympathy, and for the Russians a good deal of contempt, but we inspire true detestation." And the paper that publishes these lines adds: "The assassins of Liège and the incendiaries of Louvain inspire an even greater detestation in us."

All this made me think, when our guide told us, an hour ago, that we were going to visit the Boches in the Boulogne hospital, that I was going to take part in one of those mute, pathetic scenes in which

one discerns, through the cold correctness imposed by discipline, what is perhaps the saddest thing in the world—I mean, the reflection of hatred in human eyes.

“Have you already seen prisoners in France?” my companion asked me.

“Yes,” I answered, “I have seen them in Touraine, in Brittany, and in the south—immense camps of prisoners.” I have seen grey troops of soldiers whose faces betray nothing but a great weariness and indifference. I have seen officers walking about in the courtyards of fortresses like caged beasts, who seem rather to growl than to speak; and always, in spite of the gentleness with which the French treat the conquered, always, I have felt, during these visits, an impression of intense uneasiness.

The material fact in such cases counts for nothing. A people like the French never lowers itself so far as to be hard on those who cannot defend themselves. The Germans who are in French barracks are better treated than their companions who remain in garrisons beyond the Rhine; and yet, however much pity they may feel, the French cannot forget that these men are of those who have burnt their towns, sacked their churches, violated their women, and murdered their children.

The English military doctor who receives us at Boulogne, and who is going to show us his Boches, tells us in answer to something I say to him, that his fellow-countrymen cannot accept in principle the theory of reprisals, because they know that in practice it only leads to injustice. “Thus,” he adds, “at this moment in Prussia, our imprisoned

officers complain of the humiliations thrust upon them, and our soldiers assure us that they would prefer to be set at hard labour to the existence they endure amongst the enemy. If we wanted to reply to such treatment, nothing would be easier for us than to impose privations and taunts upon the Germans we have here. But because we know that if we did this we should not punish the guilty, but only unhappy men, innocent of what is going on in their own country, we refrain from doing it." And then, very gravely, he assures us, that his conscience as a gentleman has nothing to repent of, and that his sole source of pride is that he has been able to resist the provocation of certain enemy officers, whose insolence might have tempted him to be untrue to his character.

A young officer who is convalescent in this same hospital and who has just joined our group, smiled with bitter irony when he heard what the Major said.

* * *

"Don't you think," he said, "that at the bottom there is something of madness in our mania for considering the Germans as though they were adversaries worthy of respect and admiration? Simply because we admire the heroism they display in their massed attacks, we have managed to forget they are not men like ourselves, but barbarians whose cruelty is fixed in the blood that circulates through their veins.

"True enough," says the Boulogne Major in a low voice. "True enough. We are sometimes a bit crazy when we imagine that the Germans

deserve to be treated in a chivalrous manner. But it is better to be mad than to be unjust. Reprisals always seem to have something of a revengeful character in them, unworthy of a great people. We do not admit revenge. We only admit punishment. We are in no hurry, but we do not forget. Our Minister, Lord Robert Cecil, has said it in Parliament. One day the Germans will repent of having ill-treated our prisoners. When peace comes we shall have to begin that great trial. We have faith in justice, but at the same time we cannot expose ourselves, by adopting a rigorous system now, to the risk of causing suffering to those amongst these men who may be innocent, though they are enemies. To sum up, all the Germans are criminals. The whole people is criminal. And yet who is there who will claim that there are not a few who are not so, but who suffer from the national delirium of their country? No, an Englishman cannot defile his lips with useless insults."

A splendid clearness of pride shines in the blue eyes of our guide. One sees that the principle of the moral supremacy of the British race is a dogma for him. His soul may feel indignant, as do the souls of all those who fight in the ranks of civilisation, before the spectacle of the cruelties of these barbarous hordes. His personal passion probably tempts him to hate. But a greater force than that of his instincts—a force that comes from traditional calm, from love of justice, and from the discipline of patience—obliges him to master his own impulses, and to hear no voice but that of self-control.

"This is a strange, fierce war," he murmurs.

Then, opening a door, he calls to us : " Come in here."

* * *

Ranged round a very large table, we see about a hundred prisoners, who drop their cards, their books, their pipes, and get up, standing to attention, rigid and mechanical, as they hear the voice of the officer who is with us. All of them have come here wounded or sick after a fight. Here they were cured, and here they remain as convalescents, until the day when the doctor pronounces that they can be taken to England. Their pale faces still bear traces of suffering and fatigue. They are Saxons and Prussians, it appears, and belong to the regiments that defended Loos in September of last year. They are all young, but there is not one amongst them who corresponds to the ideal type of warrior of the north as regards strength and stature. They are of medium height, ruddy, close-shaven, serious. They are only to be distinguished from the English by the expression in their look, which is without the noble frankness of a free race. Ah, those grey pupils, those pale eyes which never look straight ahead, which shun another's look, which hide and seem to keep a secret ! " That is German hypocrisy," people say. In reality, it is something even sadder and more worthy of pity. It is the education of terror, it is the perpetual cult of slavery, imposed by discipline from above ; and the proof of this is to be found in the fact that the officers do not have this look ; but turn their clear eyes, with a certain hardness, upon all who look at them.

Here there are merely soldiers, without pride

and without insolence, poor, simple soldiers who only hold, concerning the English and the French, those vague ideas of hatred and contempt which their superiors inspire in them. As I look at them I remember those first prisoners of the battle of the Marne who were quite sure that they were going to be shot: "But do they shoot prisoners in your country?" asked the interpreters at Headquarters. And they answered, very serious and very pale: "It's not the same thing. We are a cultivated people." And I asked myself what these unhappy men think now. They had been made to think that outside Germany there is nothing worthy of respect; but now they see this noble clemency of their conquerors, who, after having carefully cured them, treat them like equals, and do not impose upon them the iron laws of Prussian discipline. However little they may be accustomed to think freely, it is probable that in their consciences an obscure drama is unfolded in which the figures that incarnate tradition, sacred duty and imperial greatness, wear cruel masks of deceit. Very often, German Generals are accused of making their troops drunk before an attack. But indeed, for more than forty years, the whole of official and intellectual Germany has been inebriating the people, so as to prepare them for the conquest of the world, by making them believe that beyond the frontiers of old Germany there are nothing but inferior nations, whom it is their task to civilise. The men we see here are part of that formidable troop of drunkards. And yet individually they are not responsible either for the crimes or the madresses of the Germanic mass.

One has only to see them to understand that they play the part of simple unconscious wheels in the great machine of aggression and conquest set up by Pan-Germanism.

The Marquis of Valdeiglesias, after having questioned them minutely with his talent as a journalistic-inquisitor, exclaims :

“Who would say that they had done such wonderful things on the field of battle ? ”

* * *

On the recreation ground, where we afterwards talked with them, we were able to see even better the immense difference between the ideal type of warrior, as we Latins conceive it, and the perfect type of the German soldier. Every one of these men, who without doubt has realised immense feats of valour in battle, turns out to be a poor timid humble creature, a little slow in understanding, and slow in movement. When we put a question to them, we notice that they do not succeed in answering us freely, and that they search about for vague formulas which shall contain nothing shocking or compromising. When they see the stripes of our guide, above all, their attitudes are almost lamentable. One sees that any superior is for them a divine and terrible being.

“There is no way of curing this terror,” an officer tells us.

The atmosphere in which they have been living for some months, however, is well adapted to their moral re-education, because, contrary to what those believe who talk of the mortal hatred between England and Germany, the English either

do not hate at all, or else have learnt admirably to hide their feelings. Here, in this camp of wounded and convalescents, the soldiers of the Kaiser, and the soldiers of King George, live in touch with one another. One might almost say that they fraternise with one another. Ask these grey-clad men who has given them the tobacco they are smoking, the cards they are playing with, the razors they use to shave themselves with, or the sandwiches they are devouring, and they will point to the men in khaki about them.

In our rapid walk round the rooms, where there are a few wounded who cannot move, we have had a glimpse of several very significant scenes. And when I say significant, I use the wrong expression. Pitiableness is what I ought to say, so pitiable that I am much mistaken if, in the famous notes of the Marquis of Valdeiglesias concerning this very day, there is not a very deep emotion. How is it possible not to feel touched, indeed, at the sight of these cold, silent Englishmen who, though they know to what lengths the hatred felt for them by the Germans goes, yet forget the insults of the press, the Zeppelin murders, the mourning of their own women; and see, in these captive people, unfortunate men who deserve nothing but pity.

CHAPTER V

A BRITISH RECREATION CAMP

THE impassive, courteous Colonel who guides us through the endless avenues of the recreation camp, hardly seems to listen to the praises of his troops ; nor does he say a word about the fatigues that the soldiers have suffered in the trenches, before coming to enjoy a few days of well-earned rest in this place. But when he begins to speak of the comfort, the luxury and the convenience of camp life, his honest face lights up, and amidst clouds of smoke, he tells us of the pride he feels. He rather produces the impression of a colonist who has created a city of pleasure in the midst of a desert, than of a soldier on a campaign. So much so, that what seems to us, as simple lookers-on, a matter rather of indifference, has an immense importance for him.

“ Here are the shower-baths, with hot and cold water,” he exclaims in front of a timber hut.

An N.C.O. runs up and uses first one key, then another, then a third. The shower falls into twenty iron buckets. The air fills with vapour, and the good soldier, in ecstasies in front of his work, smiles and murmurs :

“ I can tell you the Boches haven’t got *that* ! ”

In Champagne, in the Argonne, in Lorraine, I

have seen the improvised villages where the French wait for the order to advance to the fighting line. Thanks to his personal initiative, the Pioupiou, playful and ingenious, rigs up huts for himself that look as though they were constructed for some tropical village at a "universal exhibition." Every piece of furniture represents an effort; and if the whole result charms one by a certain primitive and rustic grace in it, that is because it reveals so much of the good humour and simple resignation shown by the heroic soldiers of Joffre. On the other hand, Tommy finds everything ready made for him as soon as he arrives in the British zone. With generous care, the General Staff of Sir Douglas Haig multiply these huts and conveniences, dormitories, reading rooms, canteens, recreation rooms, chapels and theatres.

"The English soldier is much happier than the Frenchman," says Valdeiglesias, taking scrupulous note of all he sees.

But to his great surprise our guide answers :

"No, don't believe it. Quite the contrary. The reason is to be found in the psychological characteristics of our race. When our men find their lodgings provided for them and a cup of tea on the table, they do not know how to use their leisure hours and they get bored; whereas our Allies, always occupied in the search for some sort of material comfort, have no time to feel the tedium of things. Have a look at our dining-rooms and compare them with those in the Argonne."

In a sort of hall, fifty yards broad, we see a dozen or so ruddy-faced boys, ranged round little tables

of pine. An absolute silence reigns in the place, columns of white smoke come out of their pipes, various sorts of drink colour their glasses. Along a vast counter, are piled up legs of ham, chunks of cheese, bright-coloured fruit, and boxes of chocolate. Right at the end there is a book-case full of books, and at the other end, a piano. What more can those familiar with the misery of the trenches desire to be content? And yet the faces betray nothing but indifference or disdain—an aristocratic disdain, an expression that reveals a satiety of everything, a nostalgia of action, a longing for a greater intensity of life, and for stronger emotions. When a man has tasted the fatigues and dangers of battle, the luxurious camp, with stoves and concert halls and evangelical sermons, rather resembles exile! The officers, who know this, do the best they can to cure so strange an ill; and the aristocracy of London helps them with its money and energy. These huts are founded and maintained by ladies of high rank, who do not consider it beneath their dignity—though this is unheard of anywhere else—to come here and serve refreshments and sandwiches to soldiers.

“Those four young ladies whom you see behind the counter,” says our guide, “are the daughters of Lord X.”

The four are young and beautiful, and have that extraordinary freshness of complexion which charms one in the portraits of Reynolds. In London, in happier times, their lives would be full of social gaiety. And yet they are here, alone, living in huts, waiting upon rough soldiers, and breathing in the damp and smoky atmosphere.

"That would not be possible," murmurs the Marquis of Valdeiglesias, "in our country." And he is entranced by the beauty and the simplicity of these noble and charming "barmaids."

Indeed the thing would be possible only amongst the people surrounding us, who do not seem even to notice the presence of these ladies any more than they pay any attention to us. Here, one never even hears a compliment, as the Captain who is in charge of the place assures us. And without doubt such an attitude shows an absolute want of sensibility and imagination. But at the same time, it reveals an extraordinary dignity and perfect pride of race.

A sense of personal dignity indeed, is perhaps the principal characteristic of the English soldier. He is, of all men, the one least given to flirtation, the one who takes the least interest in philandering, the one who is least like Don Juan. And yet he is the one who dresses best, who takes the most care of his appearance, and who pays the most attention to personal adornment. There is not a single one amongst those here who deserves the sympathetic but rather dishevelled name of "Poilu." At intervals between the huts, there are little tents with the notice "Hairdresser" upon them, and in the field, or in those places where the patrols live in tents, one sees these robust young fellows in their shirt sleeves shaving themselves with great care. Even in the trenches in the first line, there is never a lack of mirrors, combs and tooth brushes. Fabian Vidal was astonished to see the amount of space that was given up to toilet objects in the British knapsacks. Together with the flask of

water, there is always another for eau-de-Cologne. The dentists are as numerous in the camps as doctors, and just now our guide was saying :

“What most exasperates our soldiers in the trenches is that the mud dirties their boots and uniforms.”

And the curious thing, or rather the admirable thing about it is, that all this, which might make any other people seem effeminate, with the English goes together with a virile energy that comes very near actual harshness.

In his desire to understand everything, the editor of *La Epoca* puts questions without ceasing, asking some what they are drinking, others what they are reading, and others what they are thinking about. In a French camp, an inquest of this kind would provoke a thousand jokes, and incidents of other sorts. Here, everybody from the Colonel to the humblest Tommy replies with the same attentive and cold seriousness.

“Are you a Catholic?” I had just asked a Sergeant who was reading the Gospel.

“No, sir, I am a Protestant. We are all Protestants in this club. The Catholics are in the one opposite.”

In their methodical conception of religion, the different societies who found the recreation huts never forget to indicate the creed they belong to. Some of them have above the door the initials of The Young Men’s Christian Association. Others show the crest of the Presbyterian League, and others, the most numerous, belong to the Evangelical Association. And every soldier prefers his own without despising the others. Doctrinal quarrels

do not exist at the front. Priests are the first to give the example of perfect agreement. In a letter published by the *Daily Express*, an English clergyman says: "In my quarters four chaplains live together, one a Catholic, one Presbyterian, one Anglican and myself. In certain parts a single chapel serves both for Mass and for the Protestant service."

"What surprises me," our guide seems to tell us, "is just that *you* should be surprised."

The truth is that everything surprises us, and that we admire everything. There is so much order in the camp, such silence in the dining-rooms, such comfort in the dormitories, that we cannot get used to the idea that we are in field quarters, in the midst of ten thousand soldiers who were fighting fiercely yesterday, and who to-morrow will fight again. With their perfect calm, these heroes of a voluntary army make one think of anything rather than of war. The officer himself, who goes round with us, talks to us of a thousand little things, but never of guns, or of death, or of heroism, or of blood. After having taken us to see the kitchens, the eating-rooms, the dormitories, the barbers' shops, the chapels, the lawn-tennis courts, the football ground, he takes us to a large hall, on the door of which there is a placard with this written upon it: "Flower Camp Music Hall. Great attractions. Select Orchestra. Pantomime and Ballet. The best eccentrics in Europe. The beautiful Fatma. The Robertses, and the legitimate son of Chalot. Mademoiselle Cotelette. This evening—wonderful show."

"Please come in," says the Colonel.

It is empty inside, but we see the stage with its cardboard scenery and its flowered silk curtain. An odd sort of music is coming from one corner, and a falsetto voice is singing a song which is evidently intended to be feminine and Parisian, and which produces a strange effect, with its clownish accent, and its phrases from the boulevards.

"Little Mariette, little Mariette, little Mariette," cries the voice.

And very gravely, as if he were revealing the secret of strategy, our pleasant guide remarks :

"There you are ! That is Mademoiselle Cotelette."

CHAPTER VI

THE CHEERFULNESS OF THE BRITISH SOLDIER

THE Staff Captain who goes round with us, tries to convince me that what we have just seen in the recreation room is nothing but the mask of the English soldier. His true physiognomy, according to him, is not only different from but exactly the opposite of what we have just seen. Tommy is, as it were, dual in instinct and in nature; and he lives two lives, with two faces and two hearts. The first, which belongs to his recreation hours, is a more or less perfect copy of the portrait of that extraordinary Lord Byron who used to yawn even in the midst of tempests at sea. The second aspect of him, which is the true one, shows him fully animated by contact with action, and reveals in him characteristics of an almost childish ingenuity.

"The trouble is," says my guide, "that it will not be easy for you to see this last aspect of our soldiers, because even in the advanced trenches, if there is no fighting on hand their apparent indolence persists. By dint of a kind of secular education, our race has taken up a way of behaving which perplexes all who do not know us. Ask any foreign psychologist, out of all those who have studied the

English people, to tell you what is the foundation of the character of our men, and certainly he will mention British stolidity. Not long ago I asked a French officer, who has fought with us on our front, to give me some of his impressions about what he had seen, and he said something of this sort :

“ ‘Undoubtedly the English are extraordinary soldiers, who make war as they do everything else, coldly and minutely, rather preoccupied by minor details than by great passions. When you see them in the midst of a battle, handling their guns, loading them without hurrying, and aiming them with great care, you might imagine that you were at some shooting competition. I have never felt amongst them the sensation of being in danger. Like a careful workman, each one does his duty without paying any attention to what his neighbour is doing, and when one of them falls with a shot in his heart, the others do not even notice him, so deeply absorbed are they in their own tasks. Let come what may, the general calm is absolute. The discipline that moves them seems to be a sort of ritual. Before the battle, they wash, brush themselves and comb themselves. After the battle, they comb themselves, brush themselves and wash again. There is something automatic in the general impression that results.’ ”

“My first impulse, on hearing this, was to tell my French companion that he was wrong, but I afterwards reflected that it was better not to get into an argument upon which we should never have agreed. ‘There is something in what you say,’ I told him, ‘that is true enough. There is an

apparent coldness, or perhaps a real coldness—I do not really know which—in our race as a whole. But also there is at the same time something which is almost the opposite of all that.’ Do you understand what I mean ? ”

“ No, I confess I don’t.”

Thereupon, the Captain takes out of the pocket of his waterproof an album entitled “ Life in the field,” and gives it to me with an ironical smile. “ Take a look at that, and you will understand,” he remarks.

As the pictures pass before me, indeed, a new image seems to form itself in my mind. Can these be the same men we have just left half-asleep in the recreation room ? Undoubtedly the uniforms are the same, and yet everything else is different from head to foot. Here there is animation, here there is spirited action, here there is life, here what chiefly strikes one is not seriousness, but, on the contrary, the comic note in an abundance of rapid movement. On the first page, there marches along, as though on parade, a little dwarf who hardly comes up to the knees of the Colonel of the regiment, and who shows on his uniform more stripes and cords than a Field-Marshal. All the faces are smiling, except that of the little military buffoon. The explanation says “ A mascot of the regiment.” On the following page, we are in the battle of the Yser in the midst of the inundations of last Autumn. A Tommy, perched on an empty barrel, is trying to cross a stream with the aid of two lids taken off a soup tureen, and these he is using as oars. His mouth is wide open, like that of a Japanese mask, in an immense laugh ; while

on the bank, with the water up to their knees, his companions are laughing like children as they watch his efforts. Further on, a company returning from the firing line, passes through an occupied village and the other soldiers greet them from the windows of the houses by throwing out green sprigs or branches. In another village, the officers of a regiment are dragging a cart in which a Captain and his bride are seated. The writing says, "A wounded man's wedding day." Further I see pictures of musical festivities, boxing matches, and imitations of real warfare in which the Boche is always represented as a dwarf with a big helmet; and finally, to end the show in an unexpected manner, there appears a regiment on the march, preceded by a goat crowned with flowers. . . .

"The whole of that," says my companion, when I have closed the book, "is taken from nature and contains nothing but the most ordinary scenes of life in the field. Our people are serious certainly, but rather externally than within. Although I ought to be the last to confess it, we have something of the gravity of the clown, who after having strolled round the circus with knitted brows for a minute or two, suddenly gives a jump, bursts out laughing, makes a dash at a dog, and finally throws himself into an armchair as if nothing had happened. Our very sangfroid conceals enthusiasm as great as that of any race in the world. Have you not read Philip Gibbs' book about the war? He is a writer who knows our army through and through, because he has lived at the front ever since the beginning of 1915, because he saw it in the making, and lastly because he is a true

observer. And do you know what he says? He says that when any of his fellow-countrymen seem to be most frigid, it is precisely then that he is most moved in his soul. He says, too, that many of those who seem perfectly calm are dying with fear at heart, and that, to sum up, we are on a level with all other men in these respects."

As I listened to the Captain, I recalled an anecdote reported to me by an English journalist a few months earlier—a story which, to tell the truth, seemed to me somewhat fantastic.

"One morning," said this companion of mine, "in the front, not far from Ypres, the soldiers whose turn it was to spend a day out of the trenches, and to rest near the reserve lines, organised a football match on a piece of flat ground which seemed to be well sheltered, at about two hundred yards from the first lines. The Colonel in that sector had carefully inspected the spot and before going away had said: 'You can all sleep peacefully enough here.'

"The traditional preparations were completed, and, after breakfast, about eleven o'clock, the game began.

"At twelve, a bomb fell in the midst of some soldiers, wounding one of them. 'The game's going on?' said the wounded man before going off to the ambulance. 'Yes,' answered the others. 'Then I'll come back when they've put a bandage on me.' The match went on and so did the bombardment. We pointed out that it was a crazy business. 'Very well then, you be off,' said a Scotch sergeant. And with a contemptuous glance at my clothes he added: 'Civilians are never

comfortable in places of this sort.' So I stayed—naturally. What could I do? I stayed and made up my mind to die, without failing to realise that I was a fool to stay. After the first wound, we saw three boys fall, who were scrimmaging over the ball and who cried: 'On with the match.' Towards three in the afternoon, when the Colonel, warned of what was happening, sent an adjutant with the order that we should immediately leave the place, we had lost more than ten players. At tea-time the Scotchman who had spoken so contemptuously to me before, came and sat down by me without a word. As the silence annoyed me, I said: 'I think even you were a bit afraid towards the end.' Without turning his head, he answered: 'A bit! I was mightily afraid. I am always afraid.' And after taking a bite out of a sandwich he added: 'Still, being afraid ought never to make us lose our heads or get excited.' "

The Captain to whom I repeat this story smiles and says: "There are thousands of anecdotes like that to be found in the private notes of our officers. I know a few even more picturesque. Would you like me to tell you about a scene in which I actually took part? Listen . . . During the great battle of Ypres, the unlooked-for changes and chances of the struggle used often to turn the reserve encampments into the fighting line. One night I took part in one of these picturesque episodes. It was a moonlit night, a beautiful warm autumn night. . . . In the camp theatre, there was to be a performance of a pantomime which our Tommies had prepared with great elaboration, thanks to the generosity of Lady W.,

the great patroness of theatrical art at the front. From Calais they had sent us some thirty fantastic costumes, covered with spangles and with extraordinary ornaments of every kind. And as it was a first performance, we officers had been invited to assist. If I remember rightly the plot of the pantomime was an abduction from a harem in Constantinople. Ten Scotchmen, dressed as odalisques, enveloped in veils of bright colours, green, yellow and red, filled a portion of the stage and were engaged in executing a dance which was intended to be languorous, without succeeding very well. On the other side, a band of Janissaries was preparing, with careful precaution, for an assault upon the harem. There was an atmosphere of the Russian ballet in the ingenuousness of this many-coloured spectacle. The fresh-faced close-shaven slim young soldiers took a boyish pleasure in their exotic disguises. Those who were got-up in feminine attire, above all, exhibited an unconcealed pride. The performance proceeded with its farcical episodes, and we all enjoyed a sense of gentle relaxation which helped us to forget the fatigues and dangers of the previous day. The war was very far from our thoughts. 'Too far,' said an officer next to me, to whom I confided my sensations. Then, as though Providence had heard him, a frightful crash sounded through the air. It was a shell, of course. At the same moment a sergeant ran into the theatre and shouted: 'Guards Brigade, to arms!' There was a moment of surprise and of amazement. The odalisques ceased to dance. The Janissaries left off acting. And immediately the officers and soldiers who

belonged to the regiment called up by the General's order—I was amongst the rest of them—hurried to join the rapidly mobilised column. It was a question of throwing back an unexpected attack in the immediate neighbourhood of the camp. The fight was a tough one. Everybody did his duty honourably, calmly and coldly; in the British way, in fact. Suddenly a great shout of laughter burst from the whole of my company. Just in front of us, advancing with amazing boldness, an almost visionary band was seen in the midst of a bayonet attack. They were the ladies of the harem who had not had time to take off their veils and who, even as they fought, continued to execute an oriental dance. . . . After an hour or so, the Germans fled, leaving us with several machine-guns and a good many prisoners. When we returned to camp, one of the ladies of the harem who had just distinguished herself in the struggle, asked my permission for herself and companions to go on with the play. 'We are only seven now,' he said, 'because the other three have been knocked out.' 'Very well,' I said, 'go ahead.' And I myself went to the theatre. Imagine my surprise to see that, in spite of the attack going on about them, the Janissaries had gone on arranging the scene of the harem. When the ladies who should have been abducted were seen approaching, with veils somewhat spoiled and even a little blood-stained, there was a general burst of laughter. Then the pantomime continued, and so did the exotic ballet, and so also did the secret plotting of the ravishers. . . . The theatre was fuller than ever, because our General had been kind enough

to invite to the 'great first night' those very German prisoners we had just taken."

As the Captain ended his recital, everybody smiled in our circle. For us foreigners, incapable of really understanding what humour is in its pathetic manifestations, that so very English history has something incredible about it. But one would say that, for our friends the British soldiers, it was the most natural thing in the world.

Without even noticing the cloud cast by his story upon our Latin minds, the English officer remains impassive, filling his pipe. There is something icy, something almost cadaverous, in his fine proud face. His eyes seem to see nothing, though in reality they are as penetrating as those of a lynx. For a few minutes an absolute silence oppresses the room. Through a little window one sees, twenty paces away, the first huts of the camp which we have just visited, where Tommy's somnolent attitude filled us with surprise.

"Look," says our captain, showing me his watch which marks five o'clock.

And then, turning towards the window, he adds: "Notice what is going to happen now."

At the same moment, the space that was empty before, now fills with soldiers, who all walk silently towards a fixed spot. It is tea-time, the solemn hour, one of the four canonical hours of the English day. All over the British Empire at that hour the subjects of His Gracious Majesty know that work must be given up for twenty minutes or so, to sit down in front of a table covered with toast, marmalade, slices of ham and smoking cups of tea. Even in the midst of the severest

fighting, the leaders try to arrange that "tea-time" should not be an illusory function for their troops.

"One cannot assert of the English"—General Foy used to say—"that they have been brave under certain definite circumstances; for brave they always are, provided that they have eaten, drunk and slept well. Their valour is rather physical than moral, and demands to be sustained by a solid and copious diet. Glory will never make them forget, as with our men, that they are hungry, or sleepy, or that their boots are split."

That such a state of things presents transcendental advantages for the race, nobody can doubt. But at the same time what cares it imposes on the General Staff, in a war like this, in which any accident may make provisionment difficult for a day!

My informant continues: "In France, if it were necessary to appeal for volunteers, it would be enough to take the military bands out into the streets, with the glorious banners blowing, and the accompaniment of fine phrases about honour, fatherland, and glory. . . . With us you must go about it in another way. Our people are as patriotic as any you could name; but, at the same time, they are positive and have a strong sense of realities. Look at those posters that are scattered by millions over the United Kingdom to induce those to enlist who have not yet made up their minds; they speak of the pay, which is several shillings a day instead of ten centimes as in France, and also of the uniform, sleeping arrangements and food. I have asked many Frenchmen what they get to eat, and they

have not been able to give me any definite answer. Such prosaic matters have no importance for them. Amongst ourselves there is nobody who is not aware that each soldier receives every day : a pound of meat, a pound of bread, 90 grammes of tea, 110 grammes of marmalade, half a pound of vegetables, 120 grammes of butter or bacon, 100 grammes of cheese and 40 grammes of tobacco, without reckoning beer. All that has a good deal of importance for the student of our armies. Something of our pride and our sangfroid comes from our certainty of being well fed. Von Bülow has said, plagiarising one of our humorists, that in England there is no national soul, but only a national stomach. We are lacking in rhetoric and that gives the impression that we are lacking in ideals. It's an affair of words and description, rather than of the essence of the thing. . . . 'Our honour,' as Gibbs says, 'is not a thing of which we like to speak in everyday conversation. Our legendary figures are not those that have performed deeds of epical valour, but rather those who have simply done their duty.' Thus, to give an instance, do you know who the original Tommy was, the famous Tommy Atkins, who serves as a model to all our fighting men? Simply an obscure soldier who happened to be sentinel at the gates of Lucknow when the great rebellion broke out. Overcome by panic, the residents began to flee and told Tommy to come with them. But Tommy answered : 'I cannot move until the sergeant comes to relieve me.' That was all. Compare the story with the French or Spanish legends, with the histories of the Cid, Bayard, or Murat. . . . The fact is

that we are not a brilliant but a solid and steady people. Is one better than the other? Both qualities united would be best, obviously. But had we the choice, I fancy we should prefer to remain as we are." Every man is enamoured of his own virtues. Ask one of Joffre's "poilus" to change places with one of Kitchener's beardless boys, and he will burst out laughing. But in any case experience begins to show that the French and English characters, far from being incompatible, serve to complete one another. The military theorists in London and Paris have laid it down as a principle that while the Frenchman is superior in the attack, the Englishman is best at a stand. Verdun, where the French made a stand, and Loos where we attacked, knock that theory to pieces. In reality, both countries are at heart equally admirable, each in its own distinct and different way. . . .

CHAPTER VII

IN THE ENGLISH TRENCHES

IF the English officers wanted to give my companions a true notion of the ghastly horrors of modern warfare, they certainly could not have made a better choice of the sight or of the day or of the hour. . . .

From the high point of view we have reached, after a laborious ascent through passages choked with mud, we see, thanks to the clearness of the Spring morning, a fantastic panorama of burnt churches, of villages in ruins, of deserted fields, and of woods cut down or marred. All along the slopes that descend towards Ablain Saint-Nazaire, which formerly was the garden of Artois, the wild flowers have been replaced by rustic crosses. Like Attila, war in our time seems to be desolation wherever it passes. One of the actions of this sector goes by the name of the assault upon the "cemetery of Carency." In reality, the whole countryside has been a cemetery since the month of May last year. On the narrow height of Our Lady of Loreto, where we now are, 6,000 Germans are buried, and as the continuous rains from the north ceaselessly loosen the clay upon these heights, it is no rare thing to meet with corpses coming

out of their rather shallow graves. One day in winter, the soldiers counted a dozen of these apparitions. We ourselves can only boast of meeting one, but this one was horrible—decayed, livid, covered with grey rags, with empty eyeballs and fleshless mouth. What a grim and unforgettable sight! Even the soldiers who are most familiar with death are terrified, when they see it thus, at once sorrowful and grotesque. All that is sacred in the idea of burial disappears before the pitiable spectacle of these skulls that laugh in such a horrible way, that laugh eternally, with their set teeth.

Our guide takes us for a tour of these views as a memorial of the great battles of Artois.

Here at our feet, he tells us, is Ablain Saint-Nazaire. Do you see those roofs? The Church in ruins was a famous building. Towards the left, there is a mountain of ruins standing apart in a field. That is Azucarera de Souchez, where the Germans defended themselves for a week, fighting hand to hand, with bayonets, knives and even with their teeth. Further on is Souchez. Do you see? Of that little town, which was the prettiest, the most cheerful and the most picturesque on the countryside, there remains not even a mud wall. The guns have reduced it to dust. Carency, of tragic memories, is quite near—over there. But as not even one of its houses, and not even one of its trees remains, one can't see it. It is that field of ruddy ruins. There the battle was so terrible, that even the little stream has disappeared. Yes, it sounds like a joke, but it's a fact. The Melinite which moved the ground like an earthquake, unsettled the bed of the stream, and the waters

flowing over the valley, formed an enormous pond. . . .

After gazing for a long time in silence at the desolate scene, our guide murmured in a strange tone, in which I don't know if there were not something like an apology for so much barbarism :

"But here *we* took no part in the battle. The fight was between Germans and French. The trenches in which we are were constructed by the Germans, who remained in them until the May of 1915. Then the French took them over until a little while ago. We have only been here a few months."

Those few months, if I mistake not, have sufficed completely to change the famous sector of Notre Dame.

"You already know this part, do you not?" my friend Valdeiglesias asked me, a few hours ago in the village of Ablain.

"I do know it indeed."

And yet I do not recognise it. The notices in English, the white huts, the silent gravity of the soldiers, the smartness of the officers—in fact everything seems to be new, almost strange. And when I compare all this with the noisy disorder that I witnessed at the end of last year, when a sharp smell of dust and blood still seemed to come out of the earth, when the burning roofs still smoked, when the conquerors of Carency had not yet had time to wipe the dust of battle off them, the methodical correction that I see everywhere to-day, surprises me like a miracle unlooked for. To-day everything is cleaner, more convenient and more comfortable. To fill up the roofs, blown to pieces by shells, the British authorities have brought

sheets of zinc ; and so that Tommy may not have to complain of discomforts unworthy of his race, ladies from London have established a rustic recreation hall amongst the ruins. There are notices pointing to the places where every class of need can be satisfied. There are beds, tables, chairs, kitchens and dining halls. There are even gramophones.

The Captain who receives us in his room, exclaims with a laugh, " A sort of paradise under shell-fire ! " And I answer, " Yes, a paradise indeed, compared with what it was eight months ago."

And at the same time I think almost with a sense of longing of that foggy, cold and dismal day, in which an old Colonel of the Chasseurs came up to meet us in this very place, and with his rugged manners, invited us into his cavern, where there were nothing but empty boxes to sit on. " *À la guerre comme à la guerre,*" he exclaimed, twisting his fine white moustaches, and he told us terrifying stories, seasoned with Rabelaisian jokes. He offered us, in earthenware cups, the coffee that his assistant had just made on a little stove ; and when he presented us to any of his officers, he said as he slapped him on the shoulder : " *Cet enfant est un vrai poilu.*" And now, in the radiant brightness of Spring, in a nicely-furnished little sitting-room, amongst officers who are very refined and very polite, yet also a little distant, a little ceremonious,—British officers in fact—I feel a sense of coldness which I did not notice in the damp cave where the kind cordiality of the Frenchman gave us a sense of the grandeur of military life, with its sleepless privation, its glad stoicism, its humble heroism, and its generous and fraternal spirit.

In the trenches of Our Lady of Loreto, the good Tommies keep themselves out of sight. In each sector, it looks as though there were the same number of soldiers as were here three months ago, when it was the poilu who occupied them. And yet I don't know if it is because the khaki-colour mingles with the dun shade of the earth, or because the fighting men hide in the niches on each side, or again, if it is through a miracle of tactics ; but the fact is that at present we hardly see a soul. At the entrance to the various loop-holes, we see the sentinels motionless, like statues of bronze. At the various points of observation, an officer, accompanied by a sergeant, is making notes in a notebook, and close by the machine-guns, lastly, certain gunners are impatiently waiting for the moment to set their diabolical machines working. In all the passages, meanwhile, there is nothing but silence and solitude.

The Captain to whom I confide my impressions answers me :

"You would see them make their appearance quick enough if the Commanding Officer uttered a word." Then he adds, as he points once again to the fields that extend to our feet :

"The interesting point here is the panorama of an artillery war. Over yonder in Carency, we had the first proof of what may be accomplished by the fire of big guns, when it concentrates on a definite space. There is not a house left, not even a wall, or cellar. The shelters constructed by the Germans, after the latest rules, exploded in fragments, like houses of cards. The only word to give you an exact idea of what that bombardment was,

is the word 'sweep.' The shells literally swept away the buildings, just as if they had been dung-heaps. The farms, the huts, the churches—everything—went down, in the direction of the north, heaped up into monstrous mountains."

"Did you see it all?" I asked him.

"No," he answered. "You know already that this was a French district. I only came here after the battle of Verdun had altered the situation of the combatants."

"I was here," I told him with pride, "when they had not even buried their dead. I was in Carençy."

"Then you can tell me if I exaggerate."

"No, you don't exaggerate, indeed."

The Germans themselves when they speak of Souchez, or of Carençy, confess that it was simply a hell. And yet, as everything is relative, those who now return from Verdun, can hardly refrain from smiling as they think of the insignificance of the battles of Artois.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BRITISH SOLDIER JUDGED BY HIMSELF

ONE night in London, at dessert after a dinner, we fell to talking of the great English writers who have written about the war. We talked of Kipling, of Wells, of Madox Hueffer, of Repington, of Philip Gibbs; and we were endeavouring to make out in which of their works a foreigner, eager to penetrate the tragic mystery of the British people, could secure the best source of exact information.

"You should read Gibbs' book," said a journalist to me. "Gibbs is the man who has seen most, and felt most, of the war. He has been at the front since the first day, and his book was written under shell fire."

Thereupon, an old soldier, who had not opened his lips the whole dinner, exclaimed:

"Gibbs, Kipling, Wells—all so much 'literature.' On our side, only one man has told the truth, in all its splendour and horror. His name is Tommy. You should read the letters of our soldiers. In them is the soul of our race. The grand books will disappear. These letters will not. They are as it were the romance of our national epic."

In these letters of the British Tommy, there is indeed not a single literary phrase like those that

come so often into the correspondence of Joffre's poilus. In France, a certain grace of style is a national virtue, which even rough peasants possess without knowing it, and which animates the most modest pages of the most intimate confessions there. In England, on the other hand, the style of the people is inexpressive and clumsy. But, for that very reason, its productions possess an accent of truth that inspires confidence, a sharp sense of reality, which attracts and never wearies, in spite of the sameness in it. Since they see the same sights, suffer the same sorrows, and live upon the same illusions, the soldiers are forced to employ much the same terms. And a professor might easily divide the letters written by Tommy, in the last two years, into four or five groups: one of them containing visions of horror; another, gloom; another, laughter; another, pride of race; another, pity and sympathy. But, as for the intimate shades of sentiment that abound in French popular literature, one would say that Tommy knows nothing about them. Tommy has neither gallantry nor delicacy; or else he *shows* neither. Tommy does not amuse himself in the contemplation of nature, and—what seems to us the most remarkable thing of all—Tommy never speaks, lastly, either of patriotism or of “national honour.”

The first thing one notices in these letters is that the English people were not morally prepared for a European war. There is not a single letter amongst the many I have read which betrays a definite idea of what a great battle may be; still less, of the full strength of the adversary who confronted the writers of these letters. Some of

the professional soldiers recall the struggle in the Transvaal, and compare the Germans with the Boers. It is easy to guess what sombre reflections are suggested by this comparison. Before the formidable masses of men, and under the terrifying rain of fire, all confess that they did not imagine that "it" could be as bad as this.

"The South African War," says a Sergeant, "was a picnic compared with this. I shudder with horror, as I remember the terrible sight of the ground littered with mountains of German corpses during the retreat."

And a soldier adds :

"We have had a terrible day, for we have been in action for three days and nights. Wednesday last the officers said that Spion Kop was a heaven compared with the fight we had that day. God help our poor fellows who were wounded !"

What they chiefly admire in the enemy is the enormous force of the human wave, the hostile avalanche, the irresistible mass he pours upon them. Whence come those innumerable regiments who march on in order, over fields covered with corpses ? What people is this that disposes of millions and millions of men ? None of the Tommies seem to be informed as to what the empire and the army of the Kaiser are. With their natural pride, they all feel an immense stupefaction when they see that they are obliged to retreat before the onslaught of the enemy. Listen to these ingenuous words : "No force in the world could possibly hold in front of such an avalanche, and the very fact that our men went back so little, is the best proof of their strength." Lord Kitchener's "contemptible army"

has such a high idea of its own value, that it attributes its defeats only to the superiority in numbers of the enemy. . . .

Here is an extract from a letter received by a gardener from his son: "You complained last year of a swarm of wasps that destroyed your fruit, but I assure you, father, that there could not have been more of them than the Germans who attacked us. They are cowards when they come against the bayonets. A young lieutenant whose name I don't know, showed himself one of the calmest men I have ever known. What a way he had of encouraging his men! I saw him knock down two Germans who were leading their company."

All the Tommies think that an Englishman is worth at least two Germans, but unfortunately the disproportion is six or seven against one, according to general calculation. "It is an avalanche!"—that is the commonest idea; and when this idea passes through simple imaginations, it suggests the most curious images. One of them speaks of all the devils of hell jumping from the centre of the earth; another, of an immense field of wheat marching across the country; many, of a swarm of furious wasps. A London boy writes: "You know what an immense crowd comes out of the Crystal Palace after a cup final. Well, a crowd like that came sweeping towards us in the neighbourhood of Compiègne. We could not help hitting them! But our bullets rained upon them without stopping their advance."

It seems to be an incredible thing to the English that their rifle fire is unable to stop the attacking

party. All of them note the ravages that their fire causes in the masses of the enemy. All see the breaches that the fire makes in the human walls, all are quite confident about their good marksmanship, and yet all confess that those devils will not stop their march unless one can literally place a curtain of fire before them. What mysterious impulse moves these columns thus? What super-human force succeeds in thus animating such a mass of men? Tommy, who cares little for psychological problems, doesn't even bother to ask himself the question. In his simplicity, he is content with recording the fact, not without expressing his astonishment. Here is the letter of a brave Scotchman: "They come along in compact masses, in square formation, standing boldly out against the sky-line, so that we cannot help hitting them every time. We lay in our trenches without the least noise or sign that should tell them that we were in front of them. They came nearer and nearer and at last our officers gave the order to fire. Under a rain of bullets they seemed to totter like drunken men, and then they ran in our direction shouting strange shouts we could not understand. Half-way, another round was fired, and at the same time our artillery began to throw the first shells in amongst them. Then an officer gave an order, and in open formation they threw themselves like madmen on our trenches on the left."

And the strange point is that those men, who came on in that manner, are bad shots and even bad soldiers, according to Tommy's way of understanding military qualities.

Yes, undoubtedly, the Germans, as fighting men,

do not come up to the English ideal. They are not courageous in the British manner. They do not possess the individual dash which inspires His Gracious Majesty's Guards; and, above all, they cannot fight hand to hand, when the supreme moment of the bayonet charge arrives. On that point, all the Tommies are agreed. "It was horrible," writes one of them. "Under the protection of its death-dealing artillery, the German infantry came on up to 300 or 500 yards from our position, then we got the order to fix bayonets and to prepare for the charge. How the German infantry did behave! They turned tail and ran to save their lives."

And just as they do not know how to use their bayonets, so they cannot use their rifles either. There is not a single English letter, indeed, which does not assert in more or less sportive language that none of the Kaiser's soldiers would be capable of gaining a prize in any competition in Great Britain. "They are such bad shots," writes a Sergeant, "that if they were on the sands at Blackpool, I don't think they could hit the sea." Another Sergeant exclaims: "What rotten shots they are! They wouldn't hit a rabbit once in a hundred tries."

But if their shooting is bad, their artillery work is admirable. The Tommies are agreed about that also. I have here a few fragments from letters, which give the impression of machine-gun fire, upon the minds of the bravest among them. "Nothing could have stood against such a deadly attack," says a Scotchman. "It was like a rain or hail of lead. And even if you allowed for the sur-

prise we felt, it would be difficult to give an account of what happened." An Irishman writes : " Nobody who has not seen it can imagine what a sight it was, and I don't think I shall be able to forget it if I live for many years. I can assure you it is not very jolly to see a comrade's head torn off by shell. These are horrible sights I shall never forget. It seemed there was nothing but the face of death glaring continually at us." Another Irishman says : " I assure you, mother, that it was terrible to see our chaps falling, one with his head, another with his hands or feet torn off by the roots. I fought almost shirtless, and a piece of shell took off part of my shoulder without even actually touching me." A London volunteer writes : " We got off at Havre and began the journey. We were under fire for twenty minutes on the first day, shells raining everywhere about us, yet we got out of it with only a horse killed. It was a miracle. We were continually under fire all day and at night on the march. It is horrible to hear the artillery roaring day and night."

And yet neither the clash of the first battle nor the horror and torment of fire and steel succeeds in weakening the courage of Tommy. With his great pride as a superior person, he admits that he has had some bad times to go through, and that once or twice he has had to go back before the "push" of the enemy. But that does not make him confess himself worthy of any but the first place in the world. In one of the most recent letters on my list, a lieutenant of Dragoons says to his mother—"All our men, in fact the whole British army, are fit as anything and lively as mustard.

There is no keeping them in." In another letter I come across these admirable words, which would certainly make the Prussian officer smile: "They think they can conquer any army in the world, simply by throwing great masses of troops against it, but they are finding out their mistake, now that they are fighting with the English troops."

And what shall I say of the following phrases?—"I have been in four French hospitals. I had to be moved because the Germans had them under fire. In my opinion, they are not worth much as soldiers, and if it were not for their artillery they would have been driven out long ago. Certainly our losses are great, but theirs are greater still."

But perhaps the most characteristic extract is this: "I am proud of belonging to the British army on account of the way it managed to behave. There could be no better tribute than that of a German officer who said when he was taken prisoner, 'It is hell to resist the British army.'"

The lack of sensitiveness in the British soldier who sees a comrade fall, without feeling, or at least without showing, the faintest emotion, appears so clearly in Tommy's letters, that we who are accustomed to read the simple yet sublime tributes of regret written by the French Poilu are perplexed by such indifference. You must not look, indeed, for any tears shed over the graves of the battle-field in such collections as that I have been reading. Either by instinct, or by philosophy, either by nature or by education, the khaki-clad warrior shuns phrases of mourning, as though they showed a want of spirit. "My comrade fell dead at my

side," he has a way of saying, without a word of lamentation; and if the sight of the horrible wounds that shells and bombs produce, fills them sometimes with indignation or ideas of revenge, it never seems to bring a tear to their eyes. There is something cruel or hard, undoubtedly, in this attitude; but there is also something Hellenic, something stoical, something that shows a strength of soul worthy of all respect. Why rebel against the irreparable? That is what the voice of the race seems to murmur in each of these manly hearts. And the proof that it is only the final, unarguable and incurable side of death that inspires the atmosphere of serene indifference that shocks us is found in the infinite kindness with which Tommy helps the wounded and grows indignant over the innocent victims of the war. All the world knows of the innumerable instances of soldiers who have accomplished acts of heroism and of self-sacrifice in trying to save a comrade. Not so well known is the profound emotion which these cold men feel in the places through which the German hordes have passed.

On that account, I want to quote one or two fragments of letters about the atrocities.

A soldier writes from hospital: "Their treatment of women will remain as a scandal so long as the world lasts. We shall never forgive or forget. We are longing to get back to the front. If the people at home could imagine the devilish crimes committed by these Germans, they would be eager to come out here and take their part in the struggle. Both women and girls were shot—in fact the Germans did not seem much to care whom they killed,

and they seemed to take a delight in burning houses and scattering terror everywhere."

And another writes from the trenches : " I should not like to have to live these days over again either for love or money. It's not war, it is murder. The Germans kill our wounded wherever they find them."

Another writes : " If you could see the poor Belgian women who have had to leave their houses with their children in their arms, you could not help pitying them."

Another writes : " The women and children of England can consider themselves lucky. Those over here were forced to go from village to village carrying their little ones. The sight went to my heart. The Germans don't use rifles, but big guns against the rifles of our infantry. They are very barbarous and kill the wounded in a most horrible manner."

But what is the use of quoting ? The story of German cruelties is the longest and most shameful in this war. It dishonours not only the people guilty of it, but the whole of humanity, and it suffices to show the vanity of all our illusions about moral progress in the world.

But the German soldier appears odious to the British soldier, not only on account of the atrocities he commits, but also on account of his manner of committing them. From his own point of view, Tommy might be able to understand, and even to show a certain respect, for a monster of cruelty ; provided he were brave and open. For Tommy places the spirit of chivalry, nobility of race, and loyalty in battle, above all other human qualities.

However humble his station in life may be, Tommy is always a gentleman who follows the tradition of "fair play." And so it happens that in face of the underhand ways of the Germans, his calm disappears, and his stolidity turns to indignation. Listen to him as he speaks of these sad things :

"We are all very tired," says one letter, "but always wide-awake and full of spirit. My regiment has had an unlucky adventure, and I am very much afraid it has been wiped out, though I've no details yet. It was caught in a village by Germans concealed in the houses. They put on our uniforms in order to set a trap for us. I shall never again respect the Germans, wherever I come across them. They have no sense of honour, and several cases have been known of their being found with French or English uniforms, thus breaking the Convention of Gibraltar."

A Scotch sergeant writes : "Until now I thought the Germans were a civilised race, but they are nothing but savages. Not even niggers would do what they have done. Just think ! They mount machine-guns, sometimes, on the ambulance cars of the Red Cross."

A private says : "The Turks and Bulgarians were not a bit worse. It is quite a common thing for them to take aim from behind ambulances, and to finish off the wounded. This is known from eye-witnesses. The Germans are drunk with savagery in an orgy of the most disgusting cruelty."

And indeed an army that understands and practises war in such a way as the Germans, cannot fail to inspire horror and contempt in the descendants of the men who fought at Fontenoy. Educated

officers and the "intellectuals" of London try to hide this contempt and horror in order not to lose their balance in speaking of the enemy. But the common soldiers have more spontaneity and greater ingenuity, and they express their feelings with energy. "Just think,"—says one of them to his father—"what these creatures must be to make *us* lose our hair!"

Calm is an article of faith with Tommy. One must see him in hospital, wounded, in agony, and yet quiet enough, making superhuman efforts not to lose his human dignity, to realise what an amount of heroism, of discipline, and of training, there is in this sentiment that looks as though it were born in him. "At heart," says Philip Gibbs, "our men are like all other peoples, and suffer from the same nervous emotions, the same fears, and the same anguish." And he adds: "We are but men, after all, poor pitiable men, like all other men."

True enough. But these particular men have an inner spring of pride that allows them to show themselves, in grave cases, unmoved in face of danger and suffering. The doctors of the French ambulances have noted, amongst the many fine shades that make up personal courage, the wide difference that separates the troops of civilised from those of savage countries. The Englishman manages, thanks to the miracle of his self-control, to call up in suffering the smile one does not notice on his face at ordinary times. Read this letter from a sick man:

"The wounded came from all regiments and spoke every kind of dialect. All were sick of the

journey and utterly worn out. Suffering had marked deep lines on many a face, and yet not a doleful look was to be seen. Their faces seemed to say: 'Here we are. Nothing matters. We ought to be glad to have got out of it alive. It might have been worse.' And all of them were joking and telling funny stories."

It is in hospital, indeed, that one comes most often upon the spice of humour that every British citizen carries in his composition. To tell the truth, laughter with these suffering men is not so fresh and so frank as it is with the French "poilus" who return from battle. But it would be a mistake to attribute a certain fund of bitterness that one notices in letters written from hospital to any moral depression in the writers. No, English laughter is always like that—always with something of the melancholy of the clown in it, always a little sceptical and sad. Listen to this sergeant who talks rather more than his kind usually do:

"I've managed to get a pin-prick on the right arm, but I'm a very happy man. My word, the thing was pretty bad. On Tuesday night, when I got my wound, I saw something that reminded me of the way reaping machines work—the Germans fell just like that. . . . When one lot fell, another took their places. And there were thousands and thousands of them! One's best friend, in a case of that sort, is one's rifle and bayonet; but mine soon got shot to pieces. How did it happen? I don't know. A shot went clean through my cap. I'll bring it home and you shall see. I felt the shot,

but it hardly grazed my head. As I had no rifle, there was nothing for me to do but to lie flat on the ground. Bullets whistled above me in hundreds. I stayed there until the firing died down. Then I got up and, as I was trying to drag away a comrade who had been wounded in the head, a bullet hit me in the arm. Then I looked in the direction of the enemy and saw that he was advancing in thousands. I made off. And I assure you I could easily have won a race that night ! ”

There is no false shame in these men. When they hide, or run away, or are afraid, they openly confess it. A sense of humour serves them as a light covering for all human weaknesses. A sergeant, after explaining that his comrades and he had stood against a frightful bombardment for six hours, adds :

“ At last we got the order to retire. . . . Some hours later, at roll call, it was seen that we had not more than 300 dead, including four officers. Then a strange thing happened. I and a few other fellows began to dance. We were dancing with joy because we’d saved our skins and wanted to forget what we’d just seen a little when—bang !—a shell fell from the sky, burst, and hit twenty of us. In that way a few of us were wounded, just when we thought we’d escaped. Later, another half-dozen were wounded in the same way. Several fellows came upon a tank of water near, and they were beginning to wash their hands and faces when another shell burst, and polished off the greater part of them.”

Another wounded man describes one of the field ambulances :

“The German officers are extraordinary people. They don't seem in any great hurry to expose their precious selves, and so they direct the action entirely from behind. However the dodge doesn't profit them much, because, as soon as we get a chance, we aim at them. This probably explains the great percentage of deaths in the German ranks. They are very good at driving their men into danger ; but not so good at leading them ; except in a retreat, when they gladly go in front of everybody. . . . Have you ever seen a pigmy wrestling with a great strong, fat giant, and thrusting at him with his spear until the giant is dead beat ? Then the little fellow who has kept himself fresh gives him a last blow and demolishes him ? That seems to me like the present struggle. We are, as it were, dancing round the immense German army. Our turn will come——”

The English soldiers write as they dress and do their hair ; all alike. Their virtues in that respect are sobriety and precision, not profundity or subtlety. To meet with phrases like those that abound in the correspondence of Joffre's simple “poilus,” one must go, for England, to the letters of officers educated at the universities. Maurice Baring has lately published a few letters by men who have taken their degrees and are now fighting in the ranks of the British army, and in these, certainly, there is deep thought, rich in fine shades of expression. Read this from one of these “intel-

lectuals " : " A year of war will make a better man of me at least, if not a better lawyer." For the simple Tommy, without stripes, without degrees or other worldly preoccupations, war is no school of moral improvement, but something simpler and more practical, something in which patriotic duty mingles with the delight in the consciousness of one's own strength, something in which the subconscious plays a more important part than any principles, a tragic sport, a tempting adventure, a chance for splendid deeds ; but a thing, too, that does not need any philosophical background. In their humble simplicity, these British letters are without even those commonplaces that appear as a matter of course in other countries. You will look in vain for any talk of " sacred banners " or the " religion of honour " or the " altar of the fatherland " . . . With boyish unconcern, the man in khaki speaks of the struggle as of a bloody football match. That there is little spiritual intensity, little variety, and not much picturesqueness in the image that arises from these confessions, nobody can deny. But it may be that this very poverty in the lineaments of the Englishman of the lower classes makes of him the wonderful instrument of resistance and self-reliance that he has proved himself to be.

CHAPTER IX

AMONGST BRITISH OFFICERS

Who would believe that we were 500 paces from the enemy ?

Near this hut, run up to shelter the officers of a regiment, there is fighting in the neighbouring trenches. Yet the dining-room in which we have just had lunch looks as if it were part of some rich man's house in London or Paris. True, the table is only a plank of pine placed crossways over two benches, but the tablecloth which covers it, neatly hemmed and flower-patterned, makes it the most elegant-looking table in the world. And on it there is plate of all sorts, as well as fine cut-glass jugs with regimental arms on them. Decanters for whisky, for port, for burgundy, and for champagne-cup. And the dishes are of Limoges porcelain, gold-bordered and stamped with initials.

"You live like princes in this place," exclaims one of my companions.

The Colonel who has invited us smiles ironically and answers :

"Oh no, we are not really very comfortable. There is no ice, and besides, the piano is out of tune."

Another officer hands us excellent cigars and invites us, before taking coffee, to relinquish our seats at the table, in favour of the comfortable rocking chairs near the window.

"The coffee is not much good," said the Colonel, "the cognac is all right. Fine country, France."

All the officers smile, cheered up by the excellent lunch. A pleasant atmosphere of cordiality reigns in the room and makes us forget the horrors, fatigues and miseries of the war. There is something of a deliberate attitude in the firm refusal of these men to talk of anything but trifles. At the mess table a lieutenant, pink-faced like a girl, confided to us his enthusiasm for the latest feminine fashions, and an old Major of the bull-dog type, told us a string of anecdotes about Lloyd George. Nobody said even a word about patriotism, or national honour, or the Germans or big guns; and yet all of them have been two years fighting out here; all wear medals or decorations that can only be earned by acts of remarkable heroism. All form part of what is called the "veteran squadron" in this so hurriedly improvised army. The Major, above all, has the look of an almost ferocious warrior, by reason of the deep scars that mark his face; and yet when I ventured to ask him a minute ago where he had received his wound, he answered in a boyish manner:

"Ah, yes, ugly-looking things these pin-pricks, but then the Boches have no sense of delicacy, you know."

If the Boches have none, the English, on the other hand, have so much of it that they almost

succeed in embarrassing us. Dressed with refined but sober elegance, these officers seem rather prepared for a garden party than for a battle. Everything about them appears to be new, from their caps to their neat leather leggings. They use a little light cane instead of a useless and awkward sword. The lapels of their coats show their immaculate collars, and their neat silk ties. An infinite care for personal cleanliness—a care that in Spain would even be called effeminate—is shown by their white hands, their polished nails, their carefully shaven faces, and their hair divided by an immaculate parting. And yet there is such an air of energy, of readiness, and of manly health in the result, that it is really impossible not to admire in them the perfect type of the man of action, capable of any sort of deed of daring, or of any kind of effort. Their exquisite courtesy, their careful elegance, do not prevent them from sharing and even seeking the fatigues of their men. Even the French, who have a tradition of military democracy in the veins, are surprised, on the roads of Flanders, to see the English Colonels and Generals marching along on foot, knapsacks on shoulders, at the head of their men. And the surprising part about it is that these officers never seem to be weary or nervous. In the hottest fighting, according to the evidence of the Germans themselves, they are as calm and as careful of their appearance, and as correct in their courtesy, as in this pleasant dining-room where they offer us a glass of brandy. Above all, they are “gentlemen”—that is the ideal common to them all. For it must be understood that the attitude and behaviour of a gentleman are no longer,

as in times past, signs of an aristocracy or privileges of a caste, but rather a national gift, to which all can aspire who have the good luck to be well-educated. In the army, especially, even when an officer rises from the ranks, he can afterwards acquire the qualities that mark out the man of breeding. There is something in the moral discipline of the British officer which can be rightly compared with the old laws of chivalry, or with the customs of Japanese Samurai.

Amongst the soldiers who are our hosts to-day, there are some who have already fought in India, in the Transvaal or in Egypt, and others who, two years ago, were business men or bankers, or simply men about town. And yet all are now on the same footing. The barrier in Germany which separates the professional soldier from the civilian, does not exist in England, and this phenomenon the English rather humorously explain by saying :

“Until lately we were a race of amateurs, we were officers on account of sport, or because we liked riding, or because we wanted to travel in the Colonies ; but at heart we were simply civilians like our fellows, who only fought in matches and in golf handicaps.”

Are such words prompted by modesty ? No. What prompts them, as in all cases connected with the remarkable qualities of the race, is a sort of shrinking discretion which is afraid of anything that might possibly be called “swagger.” Even now that, by dint of insisting, we have succeeded in turning the talk in the direction of the war, our

hosts will only consent to speak enthusiastically of the French. They will not say anything about their own doings; and when the bull-dog Major makes up his mind to tell us of his last adventure, he does it in such a way that its tragic and heroic aspect is lost in the comedy of the narration.

“One afternoon,” he says, “thinking that the trench immediately opposite mine was quite empty, I mounted up and looked over the parapet. *Hullo!* A Prussian officer was there surrounded by a few soldiers. Instinctively I took my revolver in my hand, but when I discovered that it was not loaded, I wished it were possible to fire it off. The fellow who was with me whispered ‘Take aim.’ I took aim. Immediately the Prussian raised his hands, and shouted in English ‘Don’t shoot!’ That phrase reassured me a good bit and gave me a great sensation of courage. I became a sort of Tartarin, and answered: ‘I shall shoot you all on the spot if you don’t give up your arms.’ All of them gave up their rifles, and my servant took them over one by one. There were nine of them. When they were disarmed, I went up to the officer and said: ‘My dear Mr. Boche, if you behave so nicely as that, I shall really want to invite you to spend a few days with me in England. If, on the other hand, you make a movement, I shall be obliged to lay you out with one of these regulation bullets, and I shall have to bury you in this horrid hole, quite unworthy of any gentleman.’ Once again the Prussian growled out—‘Don’t shoot!’ Meanwhile my assistant had gone back to look for a patrol, and to get me another revolver instead of the unloaded one. ‘Do you happen to have a little tobacco

about you, Mr. Boche ? ' I asked. Without opening his mouth, he gave me a cigar, and then put his hands up to the pocket of his trousers. I was afraid that he might bring out a pistol rather more dangerous than the one I was holding, and so I shouted : ' Hands down, Mr. Boche. Pockets are horrid things in war-time. If you insist upon searching about in yours, I shall have the painful duty of aiming at you with one of these most disagreeable bullets, which have a way of making nasty ugly holes in the face. You see my scars ? Well, German guns made them, coarse vulgar guns, but coarser still are these bullets that Lord Kitchener gives us, to lay out those who won't agree with us that war is a horrid game. Ah, Mr. Boche, now I see you are a prudent and courteous man, and you are not going to look for matches any more. There is no need, because I have got some here.' At that very moment, the patrol I had sent for turned up, and took possession of my prisoners, after having removed their knives from the soldiers, and an excellent Browning pistol from the officer. When I had no more to fear, I went up to the Prussian and handed him my revolver saying : ' Mr. Boche, you can keep this as a souvenir, because it happens to be unloaded.' Instead of thanking me, he spat at me. Dear me ! there is no doubt that that Boche was no gentleman."

The officers all round us laugh like boys, as they hear this story, while the Major goes on talking in a more serious vein. " He's a fine chap," says the Colonel, and he adds : " When I think that before the war, he was entirely occupied with writing the history of the See of Salisbury—but

now he has taken such a taste for war that he has made up his mind never to go back to theology again."

"Not a bit," exclaims the old chap, "you are quite wrong. Things like war don't please me at all. I am extremely pacific. In fact I am a conscientious objector."

Little by little each officer makes up his mind to tell us a story—never personal, always about some other fellow. None of them likes to represent himself as the centre of the business, and, as if all of them had determined to give us a typical display of what the British genius and the British character are, they mingle humorous details in the tragic matter of their stories. One sees that what they think most admirable, and what most flatters their national vanity, is indeed not the dash or heroism of battle, but anything showing remarkable dexterity or anything unusual in the actual achievements of a battle.

A very nice Captain, who had not said a word up to then, no doubt wanting to correct the impression made upon us by these anecdotes, then told us about the chivalrous traditions of the army and navy.

"Last week," he said, "I happened to be in Plymouth, when they announced the arrival of a ship that had played a glorious part in the last naval battle. It was full of prisoners. The garrison was getting ready to give the fine fellows an enthusiastic reception; all the boats riding at anchor had their flags flying as on great days. All the guns were ready for an ordnance salute. Soon, the splendid ship made her appearance, and an immense

shout arose from the shore, but at the same moment an officer gave orders that the music should not begin, and that the guns should not fire. The men on the ship had asked as a favour that there should be no noise made at all. All of us were asking one another what was the meaning of the order, as we were patiently waiting for the crew to come on shore. When they arrived at the pier, we had an explanation of the mystery. The Commander had a good many German prisoners, and he did not want any noisy manifestation, which might hurt the feelings of men who had fought so well against him."

"Quite right," said the other officers, and they seemed to be more pleased with this little trait than with an act of splendid valour.

And the truth is that individual courage is so natural a thing, and is so constantly taken for granted in this army, that they do not think it worthy of any noisy celebration, unless it is marked out by some unusual or chivalrous circumstance, or by some special originality, or by some splendid gesture of self-denial, or perhaps by something in the nature of a joke.

"One afternoon," says the thoughtful lieutenant, "my servant fell mortally wounded by my side. His pale face showed that he was in great pain. When they brought a stretcher to take him away, I could not refrain from saying a few words of pity to him, but he only tried to laugh and say: 'The only thing I am sorry about is that I have not had time to brush your new jacket. Don't give it to any one else or lose it; I shall come back and brush it, even if I have to come from the other world.'"

There is undoubtedly, in the most ordinary and surprising actions of this race of heroes and athletes, a certain almost childish or boyish quality. Even those officers who come from Oxford, some of whose letters have lately been published, seem to be unable to indulge in general ideas, or in reflections of a philosophical character. Both soldiers by profession, and volunteers without much education, show the same preoccupation with detail, the same instinct for minor observation, and the same taste for humour. "War," says one of these Oxford men, "helps us to understand the true value of comfort in ordinary life. Just for one dinner at New College I would breathe 'Benedictus benedicat' with all my heart." Another writes: "I don't find the idea of being shot pleasant, but you mustn't believe that this is cowardice. It would be unthinkable that a healthy man, with some self-respect, should not suffer from this war, but the Germans are devils, and we must finish them up."

The tone of these comments is always the same. Light and easy, rather prosaic, and with nothing metaphysical or lyrical in it. I have not yet read a letter in which can be found any traces of eloquence inspired by a transcendental kind of patriotism. Each of them speaks of himself, of what is immediately about him, and of what most interests him personally; and the strange thing is, that the most tragical of these remarks, those that come from hospitals, from the trenches under fire, are those also that ring the loudest with laughter.

A contributor to the *Revue de Paris* says that on the day when for the first time the Germans

employed poisonous gases, there was the greatest emotion at Amiens, on account of the news of the grave English losses of the day before. He met a Colonel whose regiment had been cut up, and said, "I suppose you are very busy?" "Oh yes," said the man, "yes, I am busy enough. My tailor has just sent me over several tunics and I don't know which to choose."

To us there is undoubtedly something surprising, and something perplexing, in this attitude; but when one goes a little deeper into the character of the British, one becomes aware of the greatness of soul implied in an entire people by this faculty of concealing their pain or their anxiety, their passions, or their afflictions, with an ostentation of humour such as this. Our personal preferences may very likely lead us, with greater sympathy, to the French front, where heroism takes a form so lyrical in its sublimity, that it reaches heights worthy of a religion. A cry such as that of "*Debout les morts!*" will always remain as an illustration of moral qualities, worthy to last for ever. The English do not know those splendidly dramatic gestures, and even fail at times to understand them. Silent, cold and ironical, they have made up their minds that they have no taste for a certain poetic *élan* in the attitude of their Allies. And yet in their elegant and rather disdainful calm, with their sense of humour, and their sense of justice, with their smiling noble generosity, with their chivalrous alertness, they succeed in inspiring, not only a respectful admiration, but also a deep affection in those who know them.

One of my companions, as we take leave of the

officers who have given us lunch, murmurs in my ear :

“Wonderful fellows these English. They seem to be made of ice, and yet at heart, they are as warm and ardent as we of the Latin peoples. They are like saints, who sacrifice themselves of their own free will for a pure ideal, and yet they laugh when they hear us speak of the altar of one’s country, or of the religion of the flag. They possess the souls of adventurous conquerors, and yet they endeavour to be taken for nothing but tennis or golf players. They are better able than any other race to endure want, fatigue, effort and grief, and they do all they can to convince us that they cannot live without luxury. Can you make them out at all ? ”

“No,” I answered, “I cannot understand them, but I admire them. I admire them for their mingling of cheeriness with pride.”

CHAPTER X

FRENCH AND ENGLISH AMITY

No sight that I have seen in all the vast theatre of war during these last few days has given me so deep and so delightful a sensation as the evidence of friendship between the French and the English.

In the neighbourhood of St. Pol, in the flowery fields of Artois, and in those camps where the forces of the two great powers meet, one has abundant evidence of a phenomenon that twenty years ago would have seemed utterly impossible. The khaki-clad and blue-coated officers are animated by the same spirit of self-sacrifice. They outdo one another in mutual courtesy, and they say now, as centuries ago they said, "*Tirez les premiers, messieurs,*" in face of the common enemy.

But one must look for the revelation of these intimate feelings amongst the private soldiers with their rough simplicity of soul, rather than amongst the officers, who, in a country of great traditional culture, always constitute an aristocracy by themselves.

Often and often, as we recalled the innumerable struggles between Englishmen and Frenchmen during many centuries, it occurred to us to ask ourselves if the reconciliation prompted by circumstances could ever be converted into sincere and genuine friendship. Psychologically, there were

many obstacles to the realisation of the miracle. With different characters, with almost opposite ways of understanding life, with ideals that only have the love of justice and of democracy in common, with customs that differ at every turn, with utterly dissimilar gestures and ways, the two peoples seemed condemned to live with a moral gulf between them, deeper and wider than the Channel that divides them in geography.

I do not mean that separation implies enmity or antipathy. Even in the sad days of their struggle with one another, Englishmen and Frenchmen always showed chivalrous sympathy and noble respect for one another. We need not go back as far as Poitiers, and we need not quote again the splendid phrase of Fontenoy. It will be enough to recall the relations between the two rival peoples during the Napoleonic wars, in order to acquire the conviction, that not only have they never hated or even despised one another, but that they have always esteemed one another.

What great English poet has not sung the glory of France, since Shakespeare demanded that between St. George and St. Denis, there should be created a being half-French and half-English, for the conquest of the infidel, down to the days of the younger school of writers in London who made much of the symbolism of the later French poets? In his litany of nations, Swinburne makes France exclaim, as she turns towards Liberty :

I am she that was thy sign and standard-bearer,
 Thy voice and cry ;
 She that washed thee with her blood and left thee fairer,
 The same was I.

Were not these hands that raised thee fallen and fed thee,
 These hands defiled ?

Was not I thy tongue that spake, thine eye that led thee,
 Not I thy child ?

And the fights of old days between France and England, fortunately, were not life-and-death struggles, so much as courtly duels, in which, before crossing swords, the principals gallantly saluted one another. Never did the scar mark the soul of either combatant. Do you remember the first page of the delicious "Sentimental Journey" ? Once in Paris, Sterne hires a house, engages a servant and begins his tranquil existence. One day, a Lieutenant of Police inquires after him and his passport. And Sterne, who has no passport, writes : " I had left London with so much precipitation that it never entered my mind that we were at war with France." The police officer does not press for the passport. . . .

One sees that war, in those days, was not as it is now. . . .

To-day it was, at first, for French and British, a question not of appreciating, admiring, still less of loving one another. It was a question, rather, of sympathetic agreement. And we all said : " These rather cold, calm, silent, fair, phlegmatic men will never be able to fraternise with their allies who are dark, vivacious, talkative, nervous, smiling, gay." Doesn't the same thing happen amongst brothers in family life ? In life, even more than in love, character provokes intimacies. And the British temperament, with that streak of native humour in its laughter, and the Gallic type of mind which reveals good humour more simply

in its brightness, have been and always will be two "opposites." Try to imagine a dialogue between Swift and Rabelais, and you will see that there would be no common measure of comprehension between the two. Oscar Wilde, who considered himself very Parisian, was none the less always an exotic type on the Boulevards, and there was always something enigmatic and impenetrable even in him.

The present struggle, however, has realised the miracle of bringing the two peoples together.

At first (according to what officers tell us) relations apart from the battlefield were but tepid amongst the soldiers. English coldness hurt the French; and the English, for their part, did not understand French chaff and merriment. There was friendship, in fact, but not the more informal sort of *cameraderie*. The two races were companions in effort, in heroism, in suffering; but not in their amusements and recreations. They admired one another at a distance, but without seeking one another's company. And it has required a long stretch of two years to bring both to realise that, at bottom, seriousness and light-heartedness are but the two national masks, created by climate or by tradition, to conceal a common fund of simple sincerity, of inviolable nobility and of sane and wholesome pride.

One day, I remember, somebody asked an Englishman :

"What is the best country in the world?"

"England," was the answer.

"And then?"

"Then France."

Soon afterwards, a Frenchman to whom the same

question was put, answered: "We are the first, and after us come the English."

With that basis to build upon, there can be no difficulty in getting to understand one another, if only some superficial mutual concessions be readily made. For all is superficial that does not affect the soul.

And the soul of the two allies now side by side on the blood-stained fields of Flanders and of France, is surely one and the same. "A common hatred," outside observers say, "has brought these men together." Hatred? No. There is no hatred amongst those in the trenches. Hatred remains for journalists, and fills political speeches, or conversation in French cafés and London restaurants. Out there, under shell fire, there exists no more than a profound contempt for the Germans, as for a people enslaved by a tyranny; and a profound respect, mingled with pity, for the Germans as fighting men. There is certainly no hatred. The unifying sentiment is, therefore, something grander and more consoling. It is due to daily contact and companionship, brotherhood in danger, the consciousness of having undertaken the self-same work of salvation. It is, lastly, the half-conscious study of one another's qualities. All this it is that strengthens the moral alliance whose evidences move us so much as we visit the camps where French and British meet.

One must read Tommy's letters to see how this new fraternity with the French is born of love, rather than of hatred for the enemy. Listen to these words of a wounded man who discovers in a nurse the very soul of France:

“There was a French girl helping to bandage us. I don’t know how she managed to bear it. There were horrible cases to be attended to, but she never drew back, and was never without her gentle sad smile for every one of them. If any one deserves a special place in Paradise, this angel certainly does. God bless her! She monopolises the care and affection of all survivors in our division. All the French people are extremely generous, for they give us anything we want. One can’t help liking them, especially the children.”

Listen also to this other Englishman who speaks from the trenches :

“The struggle has been very severe lately for everybody and especially for the French in several places where they are holding on in spite of all, and they deserve to win a victory that shall blot the Germans off the map. Whenever we pass them on the road, however busy they may be, they greet us enthusiastically, and cheer us on our march. There is much friendly rivalry between us, as to who shall take up the position of greatest danger. . . . There’s a sense of sport in this rivalry.”

And finally hear this British warrior :

“The French were enthusiastic about us before putting us to the trial, but now that we have in a sense justified our existence, they are wild about us. In the towns and villages we pass, we are received with such scenes of enthusiasm that I

sometimes think the French soldier must be jealous of us. The people seem to have eyes only for us and they do all they can to please us. They give us the best they have, though it may be little enough, as the Germans have taken away everything they could find. The kind thought is what flatters us most, and if it's only a glass of water they offer us we are pleased. The majority of us are proud of fighting for a nation worth the pains, and experience shows us that in future there can be no motive for a quarrel between England and France."

But a French peasant who offered us a drink of cyder in a village of Picardy gave us perhaps the most graphic illustration of the change worked in Franco-British relations by the war :

"Those men who seemed far-off to us once," he said, "seem now to be our sons." And he added that the stern enthusiasm with which those same men defended French villages and rivalled French "poilus" in ardour brought tears to his eyes. . . .

Yes, all this is true, undoubtedly. And it is comforting for the future, as a token of the coming peace of the world ; because, just as Malherbe in the seventeenth century asserted that the peace of all Europe depended on France and Spain united, so to-day one may say that the fate of to-morrow is in the friendship of France and Britain. Let their alliance be maintained and the world will be able to breathe in quiet. To achieve that result, mutual interests already existed for a century. What was wanting was the current of sympathy, love, and mutual comprehension of character.

War has achieved this miracle. Let us curse war for its horrors, the mourning it brings, the blood it sheds, the flames it spreads over the world, the hatred it excites, the misery it causes, the ghastly deeds it prompts. Let us curse it because it is war, and, this time, a war of barbarians against civilisation. But at the same time, in that it has made of two ancient rivals, two brothers of the soul, let us bless this war and be glad of it.

CHAPTER XI

CROSSING THE CHANNEL

THE boat in which we are about to cross the Channel is moored next the *Sussex*, whose ruins we have just visited. A little farther on, in the same harbour, two pieces of wreckage show their masts and their funnels. Farther away, about a mile from our boat, we see the floating mass of a schooner signalling for help. These are but a few victims of mines and submarines, placed near the harbour, one would say, in order to inspire travellers with prudence !

“ If you don’t want to run the risk of crossing,” says Lord Drogheda, “ there is still time to turn back.”

The Marquis of Valdeiglesias, in his capacity as leader of the party, answers for the others, with the cheerfullest energy :

“ Certainly we want to. The more danger there is, the more glad we are to make the trial.”

“ Please note,” adds our guide, “ that if passenger traffic has been suppressed between here and Folkestone, on account of the numerous accidents during the last few weeks, the route from Havre still remains open to the public ; and that is a good

deal safer. We might go and embark at Havre if you like. Here we shall have to make the voyage on one of the troop ships, which the enemy makes the greatest effort to torpedo, if he can."

"All the better," says our companion.

Then a ruddy-faced officer comes up to us and asks us to sign a declaration, which makes it clear that, whatever may happen, the Government of His British Majesty undertakes no responsibility. Next, another officer takes us to the bridge, without saying a word as he does so.

And here we are aboard the *Invicta*, amidst lazy-looking Tommies who glance at us indifferently, as if they found nothing strange in seeing three poor writers of a distant and peaceable country coming to share with them the risks of sea-peril. All have on life-jackets of cork, in addition to their khaki uniforms, and each of them has, on his collar, the number which corresponds to one of the life-boats hanging on either side of the ship. To us, too, they give a life-jacket and a number, the number 13.

"Rather a bad omen," murmurs Fabian Vidal.

Valdeiglesias asks, when he sees the cork belts :

"What are we supposed to do with these cumbersome things ? "

We all agree to put them away in a corner, as we prefer to trust in Providence rather than in our abilities as swimmers.

It is a clear day—one of those Spring days that come in the north, when the sun, after staying long away, seems to bring a new joy in its return to the world. There is not a cloud in the pale blue sky. The sea stretches away like a lake, in the

heavenly mystery of its stillness; and, in its distances, it is caught by golden gleams. It is a day in which ideas of death seem to be absurd, and no one dares to suggest them without smiling as though they were the most absurd imaginable; but in spite of that, all about us threatens danger, treachery, tragedy. Here, even clearer than in the battle-fields of Artois, where we walked on a ground mined at every step—ground which might have exploded under our feet at any moment—our reason is conscious, with almost mathematical accuracy, of the frightful game that death plays with our lives. According to the sailors, every fortunate crossing, in these waters sown with mines, is a perfect miracle. The insurance companies are quite certain of it, and for that reason they do not care to accept policies upon life or valuables. And yet if my instinct does not deceive me, there is not the least fear or anxiety amongst the passengers or crew. A perfectly calm confidence, and a perhaps overweening faith in the force of our star—something which is too subtle for analysis, and which rests upon the obscure logic of instinct—keeps up our hearts, sustains us better than a life-belt, and assures us that we are not yet at the end of our existences.

“I am not sure we were right in visiting the *Sussex* before starting,” says Lord Drogheda to us.

And indeed, in spite of ourselves, a tragedy that one of the crew has just recounted, returns to our memories.

On that dreadful day on which the *Sussex* went down, the sun shone clearly as it does to-day. The sea was green and calm, and the passengers laughed

with one another. It was just lunch-time—a peaceful moment when conversation is apt to be light and happy. Everybody knew of the reality of the danger, but everybody in his soul believed that Providence would bring him safe and sound to port. Why indeed should ill luck fasten upon them? . . . The truth is that they might well have asked why ill luck should *spare* them, but in an atmosphere of light and cheerfulness nobody ever asks himself that question. . .

“A moment later,” says the sailor who took us round, “some one astern shouted out: ‘Look out, look out!’ I was in the middle of the boat just near the funnels, and when I heard that shout, I looked out towards the sea. At the same moment, the explosion took place. If you could realise what such hours as that are like! Like madmen, without being aware of what they were doing, the men threw themselves into the water. The women shrieked—shrieked and wailed and ran in every direction, searching for some hoped-for plank to cling to. As for me, I fell down here on this very spot senseless, but fortunately my stunned sensation lasted only a little while. When I got up again, I saw a number of wounded all about me, An officer was trying to make himself heard, and to calm those who had not made a rush for the sea. With perfect self-control, the crew were launching the lifeboats which were full of passengers. One of them drew off. Those who remained on the bridge could not help looking on with envy. . . . Then another boat; then two others. Those who were in the water tried to reach these boats without realising that one more person in any of

them would make it upset. But those who rowed drew away from the swimmers implacably. Time seemed to pass with a horrible slowness and the ship still did not go down. The Captain who had examined the prow and satisfied himself that the compartments were secure, gave orders to the small boats to return. The tumult and the shouting made one think that one was in a madhouse. Nobody heard and everybody screamed. In vain did the Captain assure us that there was no danger. Until the *Maria Teresa* drew near to take us all on board, the confusion did not cease."

"To think that just the same thing might easily have happened to us," said Valdeiglesias, after having recalled this memory, and then smiling, without boasting, and quite calmly, he exclaims:

"But nothing would happen to us. Besides, we all see that we are well looked after."

And indeed just in front of us, two diminutive-looking vessels sail ahead, making turns and returns upon themselves, alternately near and far from us. They look like brave guardian mastiffs, and we seem to be the flock in their charge. They are very small, and very rapid. Sometimes they are lost in the distance, and then they make their reappearance, starboard or larboard, come with us for a little time, signalling mysteriously to our Commander, and proceed to vanish on the horizon again.

"Are they torpedo boats?" I ask an officer.

"No," he says, "Monitors. The newest type we possess, the lightest, and the best. They were created to make fun of torpedoes. Look here."

And he hands me a newspaper in which I see a

report of the launching of one of the first of these boats from the British shipyards.

"It was so little and so young," says the writer, "that nobody had taken the trouble to baptise it. It had a number instead of a name. One can scarcely say that its crew of seventy men lives on board, but rather looks as if it were balanced on top of it. Our enemies must regard the arrival of the newcomer with a certain amount of amusement and contempt.

"The crew were just beginning to take a bath. Apparently all sailors have the divine power of living under water.

"With the help of some row boats, we went to examine this extraordinary new phenomenon. These monitors only carry two seven-pound guns and an anti-aircraft gun."

And now one of us, who is the most journalisticly inclined of the three, and the only one who sees the possibilities of a "sensation," exclaims:

"Do you know what would be stupendous? If a submarine appeared now just in front of us, and fired off a torpedo and sunk our boat!"

"Good heavens!" interrupted Fabian Vidal.

"Just wait," said the other. "Wait a moment. If the catastrophe did happen and we survived it, what amazing articles we should write——"

To-day in our crossing of the Channel, I am pleased to see that we are all optimists, that we all love life, and that we all have in our destiny that blind faith which ought rather to be called clairvoyance. All three of us know that the danger exists indeed. It is for us not a threatening vision, not a terrifying obsession, but a vague and almost

abstract thing, like the other mysteries of the world, like death or like love; and besides—where is there not danger?

Scarcely two months ago, in Madrid, my dear friend Rodolfo Gache came to the station with me to bid me good-bye, in all the poetry and strength of his twenty years. He told me to be careful, and with much affectionate chaffing, promised that he would write an elegy on me if I happened to be killed by a shell, and to-day as we go on board Valdeiglesias tells me:

“Do you know! Have you heard? Gache is dead!”

In reality life is nothing. And death, too, is nothing. There is only one reality, and that is the continual miracle of things. Is this optimism? No. It is no more than a very old philosophy, the philosophy of a poet who says—

Riez comme au printemps s'agitent les rameaux ;
Pleurez comme la bise et le flot sur la grève ;
Goûtez tous les plaisirs et souffrez tous les maux,
Et dites : C'est beaucoup et c'est l'ombre d'un rêve. . . .

“The shadow of a dream,” as far as our voyage is concerned, begins to vanish away, for we see nothing at all extraordinary. Never was the sky so beautiful, never the sea so kind. Even in the still Italian lakes, boats move more than ours in this stormy Channel. Providence hands us a cup of sky-blue like that with which it used to intoxicate the Argonauts. Unconsciously, we have lost sight of mines, submarines, torpedoes and great deeds; and, in the silence, presided over by the gentle calm of this air, we caress the fringes of the great

vague vision that seems to fill the space. The war itself seems to us at this moment nothing but an absurd drama, of which we do not perceive the object or need. From the lips of my companions there come fragments of phrases which show us a pacific state of mind, full of a tranquillising philosophy——

“One would say it were a lie. Twenty peoples fighting with one another. The whole world. . . . Most dreadful of tragedies,” murmurs one of us ; and another says between his teeth :

“God knows what the world will be like in a few years’ time.”

We are in the centre of a drama, on a field of battle that may be shaping its last act, but at the moment we can only discern what is abstract in the total effect of it. The serenity of the infinite sky has removed our souls beyond space, between the sea and the sky, and filled us with meditation and pity.

But now a voice of command arouses the troops who fill the deck. We have arrived. It is time to give up one’s life-belt, time to consider such things as passports and trunks, time to return to action. Without being able to help it, we regret that the voyage was so short, and that the softness of meditation passed so swiftly. To dream under the sky is so pleasant!—and now the hard land awaits us, the terrible land where lurks reality, instead of dreams. . . .

CHAPTER XII

A GLIMPSE OF HELL

IN each of our rapid excursions through England—whether from Folkestone to London, or from London to Plymouth—scarcely an hour passes without our noticing some one out of the numberless signs of the immense productive activity of this great people who have mobilised their industry for war. Now we see huge cylinders of iron that seem to shake the roads in their passage; next, enormous convoys of railway-cars crammed with mysterious boxes labelled “war”; then, lighter gun-carriages piled up on open waggons: or else, we catch a glimpse of some furnace-chimney emerging from a wood, or of the flames of many forges near the bigger cities, or of files of workers guided by men in khaki. . . .

Yet when one remarks with amazement upon the fantastic evidences of all this strength in being, always one is answered with the assurance: “It’s nothing as yet. You must wait. In six months’ time . . .” And one cannot but reflect on the insane impulse that thus convulses Europe, obliges it to give up all fruitful and life-giving labour, and plunges it into a whirlwind of fire, which grows and spreads every day, and yet always seems too

little—a flame that must ever grow and grow, till it devour all other energies, and consume all elements but itself.

* * *

In England, this great industrial impulse has perhaps been a source of even greater enthusiasm than the military effort itself. In its pride as the land of steel and machinery, the whole of Great Britain has answered the call of Lloyd George even better perhaps than that of Lord Derby. The engineer who takes us round several of the big arsenals and munition factories tells us with due pride :

“Our production increases from day to day in an almost incredible manner, and in a little while we count on being no longer dependent for our supplies on foreign industry. Our example here, as in much else that concerns the war, comes from France, and our Minister of Munitions would be the first to pay due homage to all that M. Albert Thomas has taught us. We have in this country certain industrial traditions which it seemed hard to overrule, in our effort to reach a level uniformity of labour. Yet, in two years, the Government has created its own national factories, besides all those which belong to private individuals or independent companies. All the material that is capable of adaptation or utilisation is being employed ; and about a million of hands—men and women—are devoted to the stupendous task.

“The labour problem has naturally been one of the hardest to solve. It has been found necessary to set aside specialists for the more delicate parts

of the work, and as we had not enough of these, we had recourse to the Belgian engineers and foremen who had succeeded in escaping from their own country. The Trades Unions raised objections from time to time. But thanks to public opinion, which supported us with splendid enthusiasm, all difficulties were at last removed. The regulations momentarily suspended will be restored after the war. This the Trades Unions know, and we have therefore no further conflict to fear. . . . We aim at securing a specialist for every dozen workmen. When we manage this, we shall be in a better position than any other power to equip and arm our five millions of soldiers. . . .

"We never rest a moment. . . . Enormous quantities of big guns and munitions must be turned out. . . . You shall see. . . . Even the Railway Companies have given up their workshops, thus sacrificing their hopes of expansion, in order to allow us the greatest possible intensification of output. Generally speaking, the leaders of industry have shown admirable patriotism in this work of collaboration. In Glasgow, certain big firms have handed their profits to the Red Cross. In other towns, tariffs actually lower than those we suggested were readily granted us. And, lastly, many factories have asked us not to pay them till after the war. . . . The arsenal you are to visit to-day is one of the most important. In 1914 it employed 12,000 working people. Now it has about 100,000. Here some of our biggest guns are made."

* * *

A sensation of giddiness overcomes us, as soon

as we enter the first of these sheds. The whole vast space within it seems to revolve and quiver. Everything creaks and clashes, leaps and flames, hisses and hurtles hither and thither. There is not a single fixed point on which the eye may rest. . . . It is a chaos of huge straps that hang from the roof, of flames bursting from the furnaces, of shuttles that rattle about, of creaking pulleys struck by chisels, of anvils that shake under hammers, of huge crucibles that exhale torrents of sparks and flame, of endless ropes and cords that twist and turn about steel tubes, of platforms hung aloft that race from end to end with huge masses of glowing metal, of trollies hurrying by, of levers bending up and down. . . . And in the midst of this fantastic turmoil and confusion, thousands of human beings appear, in the sinister glow, like legions of the condemned in some hell of their own making. Men of all ages are here—old men with sorrowful faces, young men in the prime of life, youths in all their freshness, with the eyes of children. But what most strikes and moves us with pity are the women—innumerable women, young and old, ugly and beautiful, whose hands seem too weak for the work of iron and fire. . . .

* * *

“Those are the best off,” says our guide.

And he explains that the war, with all its calamitous effects, has at least had the one advantage of redeeming the weaker sex from the sort of seclusion and the kind of contempt to which the world had condemned it. To-day, indeed, those working

women who subsisted in poverty on their sewing or other needlework, have won their right of entry into the wider fields of industry, and now earn high wages, without exhausting labour as of old.

“The strange and surprising part of it is,” he adds, “that these apparently formidable tasks are much less laborious in reality than the work, say, of the sewing trades. It looks as though each hand were occupied with titanic feats of strength, does it not? Such weights and such masses of steel! In reality the machines provide the strength. The hand of man only requires a certain dexterity in addition. . . . It is an affair of delicacy, not of rough handling. . . . Look!——”

* * *

Fixed on a gigantic windlass, there revolves an immense block of metal, moved by two chains that set it shuddering, with sudden epileptic jerks. Occasionally the mass stops dead, quivers, and seems to rebel against the energy that tyrannises and tortures it. Then the movement becomes faster, and from the mouth of the mass a metallic laughter rings and dies away in murmurs of lamentation. A moment, and then this monstrous mouth vomits torrents of black liquid, as though its iron entrails bled. . . . Then again from the monster's inside come a groan and a convulsion like a cough. . . . For this cannon, coming together thus in these infernal regions, is a monster indeed, and the twelve girls who are helping it to life are like twelve enchanted princesses who hold magic secrets for the

conquest of remorseless metal in those pale anæmic hands. . . .

* * *

After having watched the cannon's formidable mass of steel for a time, my friends stop in front of a table that is like nothing so much as a counter in a jeweller's shop.

It contains innumerable small and shining fragments: golden rings, silver rings, heart-shaped pendants, burnished lockets, tiny thimbles, and springs like those of a watch. . . . All, in aspect, entirely feminine and inoffensive! All entirely suited for the diversion of a child. . . .

"Please put the pieces together," says a foreman to one of the working girls.

Her cunning fingers piece and fasten ten or twelve of these objects—so tiny, golden, delicate! Her red lips murmur:

"There you are."

And we have in front of us what looks like an elegantly shaped bronze inkstand. This is no less than the spring that causes the shell to explode.

But these appearances of sport, these tragic frivolities, last only a moment. We look towards the far end of the shed, and the sight of the hanging straps carries us again into the whirlwind of dark, boiling matter, quivering in its glow of heat. At our feet here, there is a brick pit containing the famous machine for feeding the furnaces. "It is," says a picturesque writer, "an enormous tortoise that crawls on its two wheels, but accomplishes an amazing task in its slowness. With a sort of

elephant's trunk it gathers up the crucibles or melting-pots, crammed with metal, and thrusts them into the depths of the furnace." The trunk comes and goes, yet never quite succeeds in filling full this cave of the Danaids.

"Where does all the metal go to?" we ask.

"Come this way," they answer, and take us down to a cellar. . . .

* * *

And there, immediately, we are faced by the most grandiose and terrible of all conceivable pictures. From a height of some dozen yards or so, a cataract of liquid steel pours down into a tank. A white, blinding light turns the whole space into a brazier. The scintillating sparks fly above our heads, while the roof, the ground, the air—everything flashes, quivers and crackles. A dull rumbling rises from the bowels of the earth and makes us think that we are on the crater of an active volcano. Suddenly a shout warns us to step back some sixty yards. A load of refractory cement keeps back the torrent for a moment. The tank boils awhile in tranquillity with the clear glow of a mirror. At last something falls in at its centre and, from the white liquid, a spout flares up, and brings to mind some play of magical fountains in the most fantastic park of "The Thousand and one Nights." For indeed it is not only the steel here that glimmers in its liquidity and sibilation. All precious stones too—all sapphires and rubies, all emeralds and diamonds and topazes—mingle their flaming colours in the soaring jet that bubbles aloft and makes us close our eyes, which cannot gaze

any longer upon such beauty, such splendour and such brightness. . . .

* * *

When we emerge from this cavern and cast off the cloak of flames that has seemed to wrap us round, I feel an uneasy sense of bareness and giddiness. Something of my force of will and strength of body seems to have been left there—to have melted away—and now the words of our guide only reach my ears as a dull noise and confusion. Of what is he speaking? What does he say that we must see? Can our eyes possibly take an interest in any merely human sight after we have thus plunged into the infernal mysteries of elemental fire?

“Let us go and see how a shell is made,” I seem to hear him inviting us. . . .

* * *

A shell? Yes, but what sort of a shell? Because there are shells here of every class, of every size, of every shape. There are some so small, so delicate, so clear and so shining, that they are like paper-weights for a lady's writing-desk; there are others larger and fatter than a man both large and fat. There are some that have lines like those of Greek vases, elegant, almost feminine in design. There are some with fins or blades like tiny torpedoes. Some are round like bombs, some square like boxes of sweets, some long like claret-bottles. Some carry hooks that they may be hung from aeroplanes, and some have handles so that they may be manipulated like explosive engines.

"Let us choose the most ordinary kind," says our guide.

* * *

And we begin to assist at the fantastic and incredible work of the transformation of a great chunk of steel, 77 millimetres in diameter, into a projectile. A gigantic chopping-knife cuts a black bar into cylinders of a foot wide. Each cylinder is then put into a perforating machine, and slowly, very slowly, the work begins. From this creature of iron, which sings a sharp complaint, there burst broad silvery ringlets, amidst spouts of oil. The drill bores away at it, little by little, until the shapeless piece turns into a tube. This tube goes into another machine which marks it with a groove on the surface and into this groove yet another machine inserts a copper ring. Then a fourth instrument narrows the mouth of the shell and gives it an elegant ogival form. But this is not all. There are still other machines to see; we have still to see the infernal object brought to perfection. In order to secure that the lyddite and melinite do not bite the iron with their picric acid, it is necessary to give the inside of the projectile a bath of tin. Here is the machine which performs the delicate task. When the shell emerges from the bath, it is necessary that another machine should file away the dangerous scorixæ of the metal. Is this the last operation? By no means. There remain still other machines to make the spring practicable on which the detonator is screwed; or to weigh the whole mass exactly; or to arrange the part on which the cartridge lodges. . . . And when all this is done, there is still the mount of bronze and

aluminium to be put on, which is formed of a dozen delicate fragments that determine with mathematical accuracy the distance and height at which the explosion must take place.

“Now you see,” exclaims our guide.

* * *

In reality we have not actually seen a shell made. We have seen only machine after machine in which a shapeless column is converted into the projectile for a cannon's use. If we wanted to watch the complete transformations involved in the making of a 77 gun, we should have to spend a whole day over it. For those shells that so freely smash up batteries at the front—these shells that fall along hundreds of miles of trenches—cost an infinite labour to the workmen and workwomen in the factories. . . . Our guide adds: “Now we will go and see how these projectiles are loaded.”

* * *

In one of the sheds thousands of women labour at this task which to us seems dangerous enough. But after all, there is nothing more natural than to employ delicate hands in weighing and apportioning dynamite and cordite. Men are always rough. . . .

Our guide laughs.

“That's good,” he says, “delicacy!”

Then I look at a fair girl, with childlike eyes, who, after filling a black cylinder, takes a hammer and gives two or three hard blows to the mouth of the projectile.

“Is that dynamite?” I ask a little later.

With the quantity one of them holds in her hands, the whole of this shed could be blown up. It is gun-cotton—nothing less. I am much mistaken or there is thermite here also—the terrifying incendiary thermite that reaches a heat of 5,000 grades—a heat four times greater than that of a forge.

Not without uneasiness we put our hands timidly on the piles of crystals, of unguents and of salts, which to-morrow will destroy Heaven knows how many villages, but which lie here now, on these tables of pine-wood, as quiet as the sweetest of ointments and the most inoffensive of medicines in the world.

* * *

“Are there not accidents sometimes?” I ask.

Our guide hardly heeds me. For him, the only sorts of accidents that matter are those that paralyse chemical production.

“At first,” he tells me, “we were afraid of a regular catastrophe on account of our national negligence, which had long relied upon the Germans for the supply of materials indispensable for production. Where indeed is one to get explosives when one lacks sulphuric acid, sodium, benzine, and naphthaline? To-day in France and England, hundreds of tons of sulphuric acid are consumed every day. In order to make it we were obliged to build chambers of lead, of enormous size, and also vast laboratories. Fortunately steel was never lacking, nor copper either. And of gun-cotton we have all we want. On the other hand, acids, nitrates, and the necessary spirits we had to make

somehow. . . . You have no idea of the scientific aspect of modern warfare until you have studied the details of an armament factory. In other times, according to calculations, a man's death cost about his own weight in lead. To-day one must employ hundreds of pounds of lyddite, of gun-cotton, of iron and of bronze, in order to blow a single soldier out of his trench. The true theatre of war in reality is here, in these factories. These girls are really the people who destroy fortresses, villages, woods, like witches, with those hands of theirs. Symbolically, one may say that we are in that time dreamt of by scientists when the touch of a finger upon an electric button suffices to blow a whole city into the air. . . . This is the war of chemical forces——"

"But," I ask him again, "are there never serious accidents in this shed of explosives?"

"No," he says, "no—before they're finished, the shells are very meek and mild."

And with a laugh he repeats :

"Very mild, very gentle indeed."

* * *

And now, as we draw near "the grotto of the great hammer," our guide seems to lose something of his English impassivity and calm. "Listen," he says, "listen." And his eyes and lips and eyebrows quiver a little, with pleasurable excitement.

A dull roar floats in our direction, dominating the tumult of the machines, shaking the ground, making the whole atmosphere vibrate. And from the far end of the shed, a warm breath diffuses

itself in sudden gusts, and sweeps all the intervening space with swift and fiery currents. An infernal mouth agape, a mouth like the crater of some volcano, pants over there, and beats a kind of tortured time to the superhuman dance of the creatures of iron surrounding us. And on top of all, coming nearer minute by minute, growing with every step we take, calling out to us with its Titanic panting voice, the hammer continues its work in the twilight.

"Listen."

It is like a rock falling ; like a wave beating ; like a tower crashing to the ground ; like a mine exploding continually. In that voice, there is the meekness of lamentation ; yet, in that lamentation, there is a hoarse gasp of triumph too ; like the straining breath of sailors who row against a storm. There is something human in the very superhuman quality of this tumult. . . .

"Listen," our guide repeats, "listen."

And when we reach the end of the shed, he adds :
"Look."

* * *

Before us there rises a chaotic mass, composed of four gleaming pillars ; two flat platforms, a low-shaped anvil, many chains, a number of wheels. . . . At the foot of this almost animated instrument of torture, a phalanx of half-naked men support, horizontally, a gigantic stake of red-hot steel, which groans and quivers in its pit.

"Over one hundred ton," exclaims our guide, pointing to the hammer.

Then, without waiting for our questions, he begins to explain the tremendous labour accom-

plished in this hall, out of which come the biggest guns ever yet seen. Though not of the largest type of all, this steel stake, which the hammer is turning little by little into a cylinder, weighs eighty ton, and forms but half of the whole piece. When the tube is finished, perforated, enveloped in an immense ribbon-work of metal, striated within and covered with chromium without, it will have to be encircled with girders of twenty to forty ton. Then, before it acquires its final shape, the red-hot mass must go once more through its fiery trial. Every three or four hours, indeed, the upper platform of the formidable machine turns upon its axles and lifts the nascent monster to the furnaces that soften and mellow its flesh. And this work of cylindrical compression will continue thus all one day and night. The following day, after one last caress of the flames, the tube will be thrust into a cold water basin, the water of which will begin immediately to boil. It seems that any trifling negligence, in this supreme moment, makes the whole piece useless at once.

“Have you heard,” our guide asks us, “of those old Japanese swords whose blades are formed of ten or twelve sheets of different or differently-tempered metals? Well, a gun of the larger type requires, in spite of its monolithic and homogeneous look, an even more complex work of moulding and formation than that. To realise the multiplicity of elements that go to form a piece of this size, you must know that it requires about forty processes of girding, each involving the use of a distinct element. And even after this long series of enormous and delicate labours, the big gun is far from

being finished, since it still lacks the mechanism of its screw-pin, the straited helical centre, and the adjustment of its lifting apparatus—not to speak of the gun carriage to contain it.

* * *

The engineer gazes at his own work, enjoying our amazement. Then he says :

“The sad part is that the larger one of these leviathans is, the shorter its life is. The lighter sort of gun will last for months and years, belching its flames without ceasing. The bigger sort have their days and their deeds numbered. These have about them some of the fatality of Balzac’s *peau de chagrin*. Whatever they want to do, they do. There are no impossibilities for them. But every one of their efforts represents a step towards the inexorable end of their days.

A cloud of melancholy passes over the face of our guide.

“So much grandeur,” he says, “for so short a life !”

And then as he hears a noise of the hammer which continues to disturb the air with its methodical blows, he brightens up again and exclaims :

“But never mind. As all these pieces get used and spoiled on the front, we make new ones in our arsenals. Every day our production is greater. Every day we are more powerful. Every day we invent something new.”

* * *

“But the latest thing,” he says, after a short

silence, "are not the big guns. The latest thing you are now going to see."

And taking us to the far end of the gallery where the hand grenades are, he shows us a hall, which looks like some ancient armoury. Here there are cuirasses, helmets and lances. Here there are coats of mail. Here there are catapults—enormous catapults of timber, like those that we see in old engravings.

"At the same time that we are advancing and realising the wildest of scientific dreams," continues the engineer, "we are also going back, as though we intended to return to the middle ages; and yet this hall is as useful and modern an arsenal as the laboratory of explosives we have just seen. You are amused at these cross-bows. But they answer better than trench mortars for the work of throwing a special sort of shell at whatever distance from the back of the trenches. But we have even got an older type of machine than that. Have you ever heard of the *sauterelle* which is used in the Argonne for the work of bombing at some fifty or sixty paces from the enemy's lines? Well, this with its ropes and straps, is nothing but the catapult of the Romans; and the famous and popular *crapouillot*, of which so much has been said, and which has done so much damage—what is it but the old-fashioned *pot de fer de Rouen*, the father of all modern guns? We often use the sling, too. As to the aerial torpedo-boat, it is nothing but a gun like those that we used in times past. The only difference is that the torpedo-boat, with the wings that permit it to fly through the air, following a fixed trajectory, is not loaded with black

powder but with melinite. It's a pity that we have not got torpedo-boats of that type here, though we have abundance of torpedoes, which you saw in the shed where the shells were. They cover an enormous space, fly without great haste—or, rather, *row* in the air—and when they fall, they work incredible havoc. Up to last year we used to laugh at these inventions of the Boches, but one day, one of our best constructed dug-outs collapsed under one of these machines, and we realised that it never does to laugh at anything. In the same way, the hand grenades, about which we used to joke at one time, have come to be the weapons we prefer. Have you not noticed in the official communiqués what frequent mentions there are of hand-grenade attacks? Well, here you have them. Those things that look so absurd, like sardine tins—those with the primitive-looking wicks.”

The terrible metal objects are piled up haphazard in wicker baskets, as though they were things of little value and little importance. Some are round and black, like the balls used in playing pelota. Others look exactly like boxes of sweets. Some have the form of soup tureens, with handles and fat paunches; a few look more like hammers; others like simple packets of thin leaves of tin plate with wicks attached—no more nor less than the old bombs of anarchist days. Lastly three or four are like long tubes strengthened with cord.

“Rockets,” exclaims Valdeiglesias, laughing like a boy as he sees these last.

Very seriously our guide, who does not under-

stand Spanish, and still less understands a joke, repeats: "Those are hand grenades."

And so as to make us feel the importance of these instruments of death, he tells us the wonderful things that have been achieved by their means. In May last year for example, in the battles round about Arras, where it was necessary to fight hand to hand in order to dislodge the Germans from the subterranean fortifications of Carency, Souchez, Ablain Saint-Nazaire, rifles were almost no use at all. Instead, every soldier had round his neck a box full of these, to help him in the hard task of bombarding the enemy at close quarters.

"For indirect fire, at a short distance," he says, "there is no better gun than the arm. From the top of a mud parapet, or from the windows of farm-houses, or from the corridors of the trenches, or amongst the barbed wire, or from the openings of underground cellars, these projectiles penetrate admirably, and clean up, like absorbent machines, the space occupied by the enemy. It has often been said that the Boches have a great fear of the bayonet. In reality what they most fear in the world (as we do also) is a hand-grenade attack. There is no machine-gun that works such havoc as a band of bombers, who are resolute and well-instructed. For the first time in many years, this name of 'grenadiers' is accurate. Since the middle of the seventeenth century indeed, when hand grenades were given up as 'inoffensive,' the corps of Grenadiers only used their rifles. Now on the other hand, the whole of the infantry is entitled to that proud name, but there are Grenadiers *and* Grenadiers. The process of selection

has gradually created an *élite*, a chosen body, perfectly trained to execute the fine old Greek action of the discobolos. On our side, those who have made best use of their strong arms in this way are the Canadians and Australians, men from the fields, cowboys from the prairies, horsemen used to the sling and the lance. Without any ordered system, we are thus creating, in the most logical manner possible, a perfectly new corps which well deserves the honour of a special mark, and which, even better than the grenadiers of Bonaparte's guard, has the right to display in its cap the flower of flame that used to mark the old wearers of the 'morrior.' There are schools and courses here in which volunteers train in this Olympic art of bomb-throwing. It is an exercise worthy of the Greek stadium. To protect themselves against accidents these boys wear steel shields, and such is the athletic grace of the new sport, that I should not be surprised if, after the war, it should be continued, as an essentially British diversion, like football or tennis."

"Here we have a chance of realising the logical process of the science of slaughter and destruction through the ages," says one of us.

The engineer murmurs :

"Yes, indeed."

And, full of pride, our guide goes on to tell us of the superhuman power of all these wheels and shuttles, and drills and hammers. In the din of these infernal labours, his words are lost amongst the palpitation of the iron and the fire. Man is the weakest and most wretched of creatures, whom the smallest of these machines might devour in an

instant. And yet man—the spirit of man—has created and controlled the fantastic monsters that surround us. The clear eyes of our engineering friend ceaselessly seem to say: “You see these gigantic organisms that produce the most stupendous instruments of torment and torture? You see these epileptic masses whose turbulence is subject to the laws of destruction and violence established by Destiny? You see these never-stopping wheels, stronger than the strength of water, flame and air? You see these lakes of fiery metal and these cataracts of light that no Dante would have dared to imagine? You see this inextricable, incomprehensible, and undefinable giddiness of motion everywhere? Well, all that is our work. All here obeys our will. All moves because our divine caprice inspires it. We, the scientists, are the real gods of the struggle. Those who in the trenches wield the shattering machines are but unconscious workmen. The war, in all its terrible and sublime energy, is here. Here is the place where the new universe is elaborated. Here the future is created. Here the humanity of to-morrow is being brought to birth!” And all this makes us see that there is in our time, which thinks itself material and which is yet the most idealistic time in history, a sort of exasperated mysticism which employs the atrocious secrets of Nature to proclaim aloud the triumph of the omnipotence of man.

* * *

Have you forgotten the diabolical utterances of modern Pan-Germanism? On August 29, 1914,

a Professor from Heidelberg said: "When we have finished complete conquest of our enemies—when we have taken his lands—if any member of those inferior races we call English, French, Russian and Italian, or of those even still more inferior ones, in America and Spain, dares to raise his voice in any way but to beg for pity, or dares to rebel against the yoke of our supremacy, we shall destroy him like a plaster doll, and when we have also destroyed his cathedrals, sacrilegious and decadent as they are (without omitting those of the Pagan religions of India), we shall build on their ruins our own temples, far more splendid than any of those created for the beliefs we shall abolish; and, in these temples, we shall glorify our destructive force which shall thus have put an end to the decaying races of old."

Does such pride make you smile? You must not smile. You must remember the fact that, in 1914, the Germans knew nothing but the greatness of Krupp's infernal power, for it was over there, at Essen, in a cavern like that we are visiting to-day that the motto of "Germany over all" sheltered its quivering wings before leaping to the conquest of the world. With what a blind faith did the chosen people of science forge its armour! No other force seemed likely to resist this force controlled by system. Its monstrous guns were to bury whole peoples under a tempest of fire. The shells of forts were to be but like brittle glass under its attack. Like strange Eastern divinities, these men carried, in little dark bags, asphyxiating clouds, waves of flame, and torrents of lava. Every one of its chiefs was a destructive

god. The whole earth was tied in chains to the car of the Jupiter of Berlin.

That the whole of this was nothing but a hellish dream, thanks to the miracle of the Marne, nobody denies. But imagine what would have happened if the miracle had not taken place. Imagine what it would have been, if the march which began at Charleroi had gone on to the limits of the Western plains. Imagine that the first plan had been realised after all. What would the whole world be to-day but the vassal of Germany ?

And if we think over this tremendous danger and ask, no matter what scientist, where the saving miracle was prepared—if we ask the engineer who guides us in this workshop, for example—he will answer : “ Here, in one of these caverns.”

* * *

For there is no doubt that, in order to meet the German inferno, it was necessary, at the very beginning of the war, to summon up other infernos equal to it. Men, nowadays, count for nothing. What power possesses them in greater numbers than Russia ? And yet it was not Russia that, in September 1914, destroyed the Kaiser's plan of world-dominion. Men ? See with what prodigality the Generals of the Crown Prince threw the quivering masses of them into the valleys of Verdun. See how rough old Hindenburg allows them to melt under a rain of flames. See with what contempt Bernhardt speaks of them. Men are but workmen in the great science of raising the storm. And the important point in the manufacture

of life and death is to keep the machinery intact, so that amongst all the broken arms other arms may help to direct it. "A battery of mortars of large calibre," says Leonard, "is of more value than a regiment of infantry." And indeed the old queen of battles has passed into the second rank, since the beginning of the period of cataclysms. When the infantry advances amongst the labyrinths of wire, and begins to occupy the position of the enemy, the worst part of the work is over. . . .

A laboratory of torments, an arsenal of tortures : such is the place in which we stand. From the ground, from the sky, from the air, from every side and without ceasing, with a monotonous fury, the din of the imprisoned elements reaches our ears, and chaunts the fearful psalm of the new infernal religion. And, like figures of the condemned, the workmen stand out in the shadows against a red background of flames. Beside us, enveloped in vapours of sulphur and chlorine which wreath a ruddy halo round his head, the engineer stands out silent, yet eloquent like some implacable deity. "Look well at my work, and confess that there is nothing more beautiful in the world," his clear gaze seems to say to us. "Look long and well at the one thing man has done above the common nature of man. Look and bow down in worship." From the incoherence, disorder, and general spasmodic movement of it all, there disengages itself, little by little, an image, chaotic and sublime, of mingled beauty and horror. There is a feeling of pitiful uneasiness—of anguish almost—in the thoughts that such a waste of energy and genius, of magic and force, of violence and patience, bring

to our minds in this hallucination. "All for destruction!" we reflect. And yet, at the same time, a noble pride exalts us, a pride half divine and half devilish, something at once Promethean and Satanic. . . . Is not the myth of the fabulous Titan here realised at last? Do not these apparently feeble creatures manage and enchain and control lightning, fire and tempest? . . . Yes, this is in good truth the lightning. And we are the gods who govern it. . . .

CHAPTER XIII

AN INTERNMENT CAMP NEAR LONDON

THE first visit we pay, in enormous London, is to the civilians who are interned here.

In the Alexandra Palace, in the midst of a fine park, 3,000 of the Kaiser's subjects, or of the Austrian Emperor's, impatiently await the day of blessed peace which shall restore them to their liberty. Before the war, all or most of them worked in the City, attending to business quietly, without ever dreaming that an unhappy day would come to turn them into prisoners. Amongst them, it appears, are some who are very well off; others are artists of distinction; others still have come from nobody knows where, occupied nobody knows how; and finally many were eking out a poor existence in the workshops or factories of the country. Now war has levelled social conditions for them, and all of them are sleeping on the same sort of truckle bed, guarded by the same impassive sentinels.

"I suppose these men are not treated with such care as the prisoners we've seen in hospital at Boulogne," I say to the official who takes us round.

"Why?" he asks.

"On account of the bad treatment the British civilians receive in Germany."

And I recall to his mind the revelations that have been published concerning the treatment of the British interned in Germany since the beginning of the war.

But he remarks, without the faintest sign of emotion: "Indeed? I'd forgotten that——"

* * *

Everybody in England seems to have forgotten what the interned civilians have had to suffer in Germany. Above all, nobody asks for reprisals or cruelty. "Why should we make these unhappy people pay for the faults of their countrymen?" ask the good people of London. And they give a new proof of their magnanimity, in trying to soften the captivity of their enemies in a thousand kindly ways, instead of imitating the German officers who insult British prisoners in Germany.

With a kindly respect for the unfortunate, the English treat the interned, not as criminals, but rather as patients, who must be isolated from the rest of the community. There is something of a hostel for those in quarantine about these immense galleries. The regulations are not strict, except as regards the one relating to the seclusion of the interned. At each door there is a sentinel with a loaded gun. But the rest, apart from this, has something monastic rather than military, about it. The food is wholesome and abundant. The beds are small but comfortable. And those who desire to work are allowed to do so.

"In France," I said to our guide, "the system is more severe."

"I know," he answered. "There, civilians are prisoners, as they are in Germany. Here. . . . But you must see——"

* * *

A genuine comradeship seems to exist between the British employed in guarding the park and their prisoners. At each step, one sees a row of books or a buffet, with fruit and cakes. . . . On the tables are games of every sort.

Valdeiglesias remarks that these men are really better treated than the English soldiers themselves!

Then he exclaims:

"What a strange people the English are! There's no racial hatred in them!"

"You don't understand," says the camp official, "you can't be expected to understand."

And after glancing round the vast gallery he continues:

"In England, we're not in the same position as the French. For years, even for centuries, we have maintained perfectly friendly relations with the Germans. There is the same sort of racial relationship between the English and the Germans as that which exists between French and Italians, or between Italians and Spaniards. We call ourselves Anglo-Saxons and they are simply Saxons. It is the same as though one were to talk of Celtic Latins or Iberian Latins. The lowest of recent estimates tells us that there are 4,000,000 English of German origin. Personally, I believe there are more. . . . There are trade unions, like the bakers,

shoe-makers and hairdressers, composed largely of men of German race. And in justice one must say that, until recently, we had no cause for complaint against these foreigners in our midst. Isolated instances quoted by those who want to make us change our attitude towards these people really prove nothing at all. In France, after the war of '70, all Bismarck's countrymen who were naturalised undoubtedly acted with an ulterior motive. In our country, I don't think they did. You might get from the War Office the list of Germans, and sons of Germans, who have enlisted in our armies, to fight for us. Many of these have risen to be officers. But even amongst those who, sometimes through excellent motives, remain at home, I can assure you that not a few heartily desire our victory. The German people is the most complex and the strangest in the world. There are Germans who remain as German as their ancestors two or three years after they have sworn to be true to a foreign flag ; as the Americans find through sad experience. But there are others, born in Hamburg, Cologne or Berlin, who uproot themselves so thoroughly that, after a few years of residence abroad, they entirely absorb the feelings and customs of the nation where they live, and forget their native land. Above all, amongst themselves, in this atmosphere free from 'xenophobia,' in which Christians and Jews have breathed and still breathe in perfect liberty, Prussians, Bavarians and Austrians are gradually transformed, so that they don't even remember their origin. You know that our laws permit changes of name without any of the difficulties that exist in other

parts of the world. Whether that is a good thing or not, I cannot say. I don't inquire into that. What I do say is that, thanks to our laws, millions of Boches have anglicised their names in such a way that it is impossible to tell whether their parents were born here or not. There are, at this moment, peers who would not like to have their family tree examined! Moreover, the marriages of certain aristocratic families have created a relationship which mingle Germanic and Anglo-Saxon blood to a very great extent. To find out where the English begins and the German ends is in many cases impossible."

"But still, there are these interned civilians——" says one of our party.

The young official smiles ironically, and says, after glancing at a group of fair-haired workmen who are amusing themselves in turning a wheel:

"Yes, yes. . . . How can I explain? Let's suppose we've 4,000 of them here—another 30,000 in other camps—what is that, if you think of the number of Germans and sons of Germans, who live in our country? We've simply shut up those who took no precautions to conceal their nationality. Thanks to our tolerant laws, the majority go on quietly working, in business. Sometimes they are traitors or spies. . . . But as our chief passion is the love of justice, we cannot be very severe upon the unhappy men here, because we believe that if a great German conspiracy is prepared against us, these are not the sort of men who are appointed to prepare it, but the others, whose papers are in good order, and who have English names. . . . In fact, those who take good care——"

And indeed the English, in their scrupulous way, have organised these camps, so that nothing in them offends or afflicts one. We see weary, uneasy, melancholy faces indeed, at every turn in the enormous galleries at Alexandra Palace; we see no sorrowful, tortured or humiliated ones. The majority of the prisoners gather in groups of ten or twelve round the tables of pine, and read, gossip, play cards, or carve little wooden toys. When they see our civilian clothes, all stare at us with childish curiosity, and we overhear them asking what we can have come there for. A keeper points out the various sectors into which the colony is divided. A captain, chosen by the British authorities especially for good conduct, is appointed to look after each company. Three or four companies form a regiment. To settle all disputes amongst the interned, there is a Tribunal composed of two Germans, two Austrians and two Hungarians. There are strict regulations concerning the hours for meals, for exercise in the garden, for going to bed and for getting up. During the rest of the day, each man does what he likes, provided he does not leave his gallery. The beds are good and the cooking isn't bad. Those who seek to avoid boredom, work at various little carpentering tasks. . . .

"Look at these wooden toys," says our guide in the vestibule. "They are made by the prisoners. Would you like to buy one or two of them? Many of us have bought dolls made here. It is for charity."

Out of charity, too, ladies in the aristocracy have set up canteens, where everything can be had quite cheaply. Out of charity the school-children send

flowers. Out of charity the philanthropic institutes provide tools for the German workmen who ask for them. Out of charity, in fact—out of a noble moral charity that honours this great people—the internment camp is more like a convalescent hospital than a penitentiary.

Little by little, a few of the interned have gathered about us, wanting to know if we form part of one of those commissions appointed to visit the camps, and to hear the complaints of the prisoners.

“Are you Americans?” asks one.

“Swiss?” asks another.

When they hear that we are only journalists, with no missionary motive, all ask us for news of what is going on in the world. The wide liberty they enjoy allows them to read the newspapers of all shades of opinion, like other Londoners. But presumably the poor fellows think that, in our profession, we know secrets that are never published. Rather cruelly, one of us says:

“Everything’s going badly for Germany. The Russians are advancing in the North, and the French and English on the other side. The hour of punishment is come!”

Their faces show no emotion. Can these men, imbued with Pan-Germanism, really believe that the invincible armies of the Kaiser can be beaten?

Our companion questions them, in turn, on this point, but gets only careful and evasive replies:

“We don’t know. We’ve no means of knowing. We’ve lived out of Germany for years. We only want peace and to be able to go back to our usual work in London.”

That is the point. There’s not one of them who

speaks of leaving England after the war ! They feel no bitterness about the law that interns them, and they are grateful to their keepers for their kind treatment.

“ We’re very comfortable here,” they say.

“ No complaints ? ” asks the official.

“ None at all.”

And now their answer is loud and their tone unmistakably frank. There is gratitude, not loyalty only, in their looks. So much has been said to them of the bad treatment accorded to the English in Germany ! They have been so often threatened in the Press with “ well-merited reprisals ! ” It seems that, for a long time, whenever an inspector entered the park, the interned supposed that he was coming to tell them of some new disciplinary restriction. But little by little they have become convinced that the English people, with its great pride in justice, is incapable of mean revenge, and perfect ease of mind has replaced the anxiety that used to torment them.

As we were leaving, an old Bavarian said :

“ If we were allowed to go back to our own country, we should not go.”

These words are surely the highest testimonial that could possibly be paid to British chivalry.

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